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THE TRAGEDY OF LORD KITCHENER

Photo, Bassano

K. OF K., 1898

Frontispiece

THE TRAGEDY OF LORD KITCHENER

BY

REGINALD VISCOUNT ESHER

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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NOTE

This essay is founded upon a diary which recorded passing events as they appeared to the diarist at the time of their happening.

No attempt has been made to correct first impressions by the doubtful light of subsequent reflection.

The character of Lord Kitchener, sketches of his colleagues and contemporaries, glimpses of the background before which these personages moved, were set down at the time and remain untouched. It is perhaps their only merit.

Lord Kitchener asked me to go to France in September, 1914, and to remain there. His request was subsequently renewed by Mr. Asquith and the present Prime Minister.

As a Sub-Commissioner of the British Red Cross in France I was, furthermore, brought into contact with many phases of the War.

From these opportunities the journal and correspondence sprang which form the basis of this essay.

If I remain of the same mind, and can obtain the assent of my Co-Trustees of the British Museum, the volumes, together with the correspondence which illustrates and explains them, will be sealed up for sixty years—the period of reticence selected by the author of "Waverley"—after which they may prove of some interest to readers not many of whom have yet reached man's estate, or may possibly prove to be of use to some artist engaged in putting into perspective a picture of the years 1914 to 1918.

"There is
One great society alone on earth:
The noble Living and the noble Dead."

WORDSWORTH: *Prelude*

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Lord K., 1916 - - - *facing page* 130

From a sketch by Jean Baptiste Guth, by kind permission of the proprietors of the *Graphic*.

NOTE

The first of the two portraits is from a photograph taken of Lord Kitchener as a young Major-General in the prime of manhood.

The second portrait is reproduced from a drawing by a French artist, Monsieur Guth, to whom, as a Field-Marshal, Lord Kitchener gave a sitting in 1916 at my request.

Lord Kitchener was remarkable for his great stature. His head was finely shaped, and the eyes, blue as ice, were in early life of singular beauty. Sand-storms and the Eastern sun ruined them in later years.

These portraits have been chosen because of their contrast and the lesson they convey.

THE TRAGEDY OF LORD KITCHENER

I.—PROLOGUE

1

"History is likely to make men wise, and is sure to make men sad."

My object is to put on record my impression of Lord Kitchener and of certain events connected with him which came under my personal observation during the months between August, 1914, and June, 1916.

I had known Lord Kitchener for some years. He had written to me frequently upon military subjects, and there were two occasions in his life which mattered much to him when we came into personal contact. Perhaps this was a reason why, in September, 1914, he asked me to go to France. I did so, and from that time until his death I remained there on and off at his request, journeying often across the Channel whenever he desired to see me.

My connection with the French people was a close one, knit by ties of blood. Since the Easter holidays of 1870, which I spent with a near relative in Paris who lived in the Rue Daru, close to the Russian church—when as a schoolboy I remember being present at a ball at the Tuileries given by Napoleon III.—I had never forgotten the sorrows of that year and the loss of the provinces to which my mother belonged.

* * * * *

Under the influence of Cavour and Bismarck, from the middle of the nineteenth century onward, the tendency of world politics appeared to be towards vast Imperial agglomerations. Since 1848 forces subversive and yet progressive, having their origin in Italy, had been on the side of national unity and national aggrandizement. Russia, too, was credited, by successive English Ministers, with a degree of craft and ambition satiable only by the conquest of India.

During the years when I was brought into touch with India,* and subsequently with the War Office, whether the immediate

* As private secretary to Lord Hartington.

difficulty was in Afghanistan, South Africa, or Egypt, I remember the military mind to have been haunted by the subtle advance of the Russian armies across Central Asia. It was the one and only menace. The advance to Khartoum, after Gordon's death, was stayed because Penjdeh—hard to find on the map—was suddenly magnified into the Key of India, and was believed to be imminently in the clutch of the Russians.

And yet, if, as political philosophers maintain, national enterprise depends rather on the character of a people than upon the ambitions of their rulers, these fears were quite illusory; for the Russian peasant, sodden, unwarlike, selfish, had never shown himself to be a conqueror or a colonist. The sluggish millions of the Russian steppes, seven-eighths of them illiterate, could be counted upon to defend their homes, but over and over again they had refused prolonged and hard offensive warfare. It was true that the dominant passion among Russian bureaucrats and soldiers, during the thirty years following the victory of Germany over France, was jealousy of the new German Empire. The bureaucratic groups were always un-

easy under Bismarck's caressing hand, and their smouldering envy burst into flame when William II. dismissed him. From that moment the equipoise of Europe was disturbed. Bismarck was alive to the peril of an alliance between Russia and France, and at times he had looked towards England as a make-weight. In youth he had admired the mother of Sir Edward Malet—Odo Russell's successor at Berlin—and he made persistent efforts to induce the English Ambassador to believe that "the German Chancellor was the friend of his friends, but not the friend of those who were unfriendly to Germany." It was his *mot d'ordre*. His son Herbert, then attached to the German Embassy in London, whose conviviality was partly assumed to conceal his diplomatic astuteness, wrote me many letters which were intended for the eye of Lord Hartington, urging that "as a friend, and a friend to your country," his father should be not only consulted, as he often was, but that his advice should be taken.* "If I had been in the place of the English Government, I should years ago have tried, not to consult,

* Correspondence and Journal.

but to bribe Germany. That means to say, I would have given her manifest proofs of the value I attached to a solid German friendship. The means for this might easily have been found in the province of colonial questions."

Years afterwards, in the spring of 1914, Bethmann Hollweg successfully employed this Bismarckian blandishment in order to capture the goodwill of English Ministers, and so far succeeded that a treaty was drafted and all but ratified, which was currently believed to have given to Germany everything she desired. Its terms have not yet been made public.

* * * * *

Fortunately, in the eighties, when the isolation of England was more splendid than usual, when our relations with Germany were frigid, when our confused policy in Egypt had led to strained relations with France, when Russia was particularly active on the Afghan frontier, W. T. Stead, a publicist of courage and virtue, equipped with curious antennæ without which genius in journalism is ineffective, came into touch with one John Fisher, a Post-Captain serving with the

Mediterranean Fleet. Between them they initiated and conducted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, of which Stead was the editor, a newspaper campaign for the purpose of reorganizing and strengthening the British Navy. The minds of these two men flashed at each other across Europe, the outcome being a new naval policy for England—a policy that stood the test of the South African War, guaranteed to our country the neutrality of Germany, France, and Russia in those difficult years, and paved the way for that still greater Navy to which we owe in large measure the victory of 1918.

Stead's enthusiasm for the Navy never cooled. As Fisher said, "He was saturated with the great patriotic belief that the British Empire floated on the British Navy, and that it floated on nothing else. When I was First Sea Lord he had one of his famous interviews with a great foreign personage who said to him: 'Don't be frightened.' Stead answered: 'Oh no, for every ship you build, we'll build two.'"

Another influence over Stead that harmonized with Fisher's was that exercised by General Gordon, and his thesis that our

Island Empire could never gravely be threatened if "we saw to it that our naval power was supreme," became one of Stead's articles of faith.

It was in Stead's presence that I first heard the name of Kitchener. General Gordon was expounding to us his curious theories about the Garden of Eden, and the archæology of Egypt was mentioned. Then he spoke of a British officer whom he admired, and whose fine physical appearance and character had struck him: Kitchener was at that time thirty-three years old and of splendid presence. Gordon's description of him was almost word for word repeated in Baker's picture of Kitchener, which more than a year later Gordon pasted into his Khartoum Journals: "Major Kitchener, R.E., who is one of the few very superior British officers, with a cool and good head, and a hard constitution."

Just before Gordon left for Khartoum—it must have been about the 15th of January, 1884—he told me, if I wrote to him, to send letters through Kitchener or Chermside. The next I heard of Kitchener was his own report—the only authentic report—of

Gordon's death. It was long, clear, and full, and ended thus: "The memorable siege of Khartoum lasted 317 days, and it is not too much to say that such a noble resistance was due to the indomitable resolution and resource of one English man. Never was a garrison so nearly rescued, never was a Commander so sincerely lamented." Between Gordon and Kitchener there was a bond—the bond of the desert; of great solitudes, of open spaces, and of the Arabic language—a close tie that the desert men understand.

* * * * *

Arabia deserta seems to me to be the key of Lord Kitchener's character and methods. His biographer has told the story of those long years, stretching from early manhood almost into middle age, spent amid surroundings which left a deep impression upon his mind and habits. The Spirit of the Sand, like the Spirit of the Sea, puts an unconscious constraint upon the nature of man. Lord Kitchener's aloofness, patience, slowness if you will, were the outcome of life lived in solitude where the passage of time counted for very little. An archæologist, an excavator, and engineer, he learnt to

make light of the hurried ways of average men. Rome and her four centuries of dominion seemed a bubble on the surface of a world over which Babylon and the Egyptian Pharaohs had ruled. The slow processes of the Orient were burned into him by the Egyptian sun.

He would have loved to build a Pyramid. What interested him most in his project of making a home at Broome was to move a great slice of the Downs from left to right, in a leisurely way. To tear up the face of a landscape and give it a new contour, as a sandstorm changes the face of the desert, was a joy to him.

When he thought of war, it was after the manner of Darius—slow-moving hordes concentrating slowly upon their objective with fatal method. He took no heed of the lightning-stroke of Napoleon. His war against the Mahdi, leading to the capture of Khartoum and the conquest of the Soudan, was an operation after his own heart. He revelled in the making of the desert railway, in the accumulation of vast stores, in the processions of men, ordered like an Egyptian frieze. The battles of the

Atbara and Omdurman were episodes, inevitable but tiresome. The rounding up of the Boers, the system of blockhouses, the mathematical precision of a successful raid, interested him greatly. Paardeberg was a horror, necessary perhaps, and he mismanaged it.

And yet, in spite of his scientific training in youth and his genuine love of figures—both implying accuracy, as they should—his mind had ragged edges, which led to the confusion of his own ideas and to chaos in much that he undertook to accomplish.

There are old Woolwich comrades of Lord Kitchener who remember him a lank, overgrown boy, with a fine brow and piercing blue eyes, but ill-dressed, untidy, and not over-careful of his person. These were, again, his ragged edges.

* * * * *

Even in early days he was stand-off and haughty of demeanour, as if preparing for his long sojourn among alien races, where such defects are essential qualities. This aloofness never left him, and although at times, when Commander-in-Chief in India, it was noticed that he could unbend and not without a certain charm display the spirits

of a schoolboy,* he was lacking in social graces, and his appearance under the lustre of a London drawing-room reminded one of a Kadi under a palm-tree. The Italians are said to be as pre-eminent in diplomacy as are the French in war; and Lord Kitchener's gifts as a diplomatist would have passed a difficult test at the Quirinal or the Vatican. He was admirably equipped with a few simple precepts and with illimitable patience, not untinged by methods which the Israelites inherited from Jacob, and the statesmen of the Renaissance from Machiavelli.

In his dealings with Marchand, near the sources of the Nile, and later on with the Boers at Vereeniging, and still later when he triumphantly played off the India Office against one of the most justly famous of Indian Viceroys, these precepts and methods stood him in good stead. If they failed him during the years 1914 to 1916, it was because of circumstances which the following pages will help in some measure to explain.

It is not within the scope of what I have attempted to do in this book to dwell upon the career of Lord Kitchener, which has

* Lord Durham.

been copiously expounded by his biographer. My object is to give, as faithfully as I can, the impression he made upon me amid the environment of the War, from the moment we renewed our acquaintance and intercourse in August, 1914, until his death. It is an impression gained from many talks, from letters, and from contact with his closest friends. It is an impression recorded in hasty words scribbled into a journal, and gathered here into something like a coherent form, but uncorrected and unrevised.

I have heard it said that he was of rough, even coarse manners; that he resented plain speech, and was free in administering rebuke. I saw none of these traits in him. I never saw him otherwise than courteous, patient, and ready to hear the other side of any question reasonably argued; while from those he liked—I am not sure that he trusted anyone—he would take chaff and home truths with astonishing good-humour.

As an administrator in India and Egypt his virtues and weaknesses have been disclosed in Sir George Arthur's biography. There is a large balance to his credit. Lord Cromer, who admired him greatly, but

with critical discrimination, admitted this. Whether reorganizing the Army in India, or advising the Australians upon their special questions of Home Defence, Lord Kitchener took long views. As a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence, a position he occupied for a short time, he seemed to me out of place. His temperament was unsuited to discussion and inevitable compromise. I remember occasions when he remained dumb under the shock of decisions which, in view of the advice he had given, he failed altogether to understand. He had been far too long himself a final court of appeal to enable him to become reconciled to finding himself overruled on matters which were within his competence to decide, and, as he thought, quite beyond that of his colleagues.

* * * * *

During the years preceding the outbreak of war he showed on several occasions his dismay at the idea of England having to participate in a European campaign. It was inconceivable that with so small a force available English statesmen should contemplate taking part in Continental battles under

modern conditions with a nation or nations in arms.

When Lord Haldane's organization of the Army and Territorial Forces was under discussion, and I was presiding over a large Committee which was satirically called "the Douma," Lord Kitchener wrote to me vigorous letters urging the consideration of a plan very similar to that which he recommended to the Commonwealth of Australia. Then and later he recognized fully the German menace. He said to me once that the South African War had overthrown the mental balance of the Emperor William, and that since the power of the new German Fleet had become to its progenitor a master-passion he would be certain to use it. He admitted that the Emperor and his Chancellor had failed to hoodwink Mr. Chamberlain, and that Lord Salisbury's cold reception of German advances in 1899, when the Emperor paid a visit to Queen Victoria, had reflected the feelings of the English people; but he agreed with Lord Fisher that the widening of the Kiel Canal, in order to accommodate the new type of battleship, which was due to be finished in 1914, pre-

sented a temptation and a date to the military party in Germany which should be watched and prepared for by French and English statesmen.

His mind, with its commercial and financial bent—for, like Napoleon, he was *homme d'affaires*—had grasped the threat of German competition: the underselling of rivals in the markets of the world by goods made in Germany, the penetration by German agents of the business houses of all Europe, the control of European manufactures by German managers and operatives, backed by the vulgar but menacing flourish of the mailed fist.

After Agadir he felt no doubt that at a favourable moment France would be attacked. Although only half an Irishman, he watched with sorrow and alarm a sad and disillusioned Ireland which had been made the battlefield of religious animosities, the dumping-ground of equivocal ambitions; and the Army subjected to a political test, with civil war looming once more upon the horizon—a spectre from which for a hundred and fifty years England had been free. This ominous outlook in a portion of the British Isles was

accompanied by Byzantine luxury running riot in the great cities, which were plunged into an orgy of pleasure and extravagance, followed by the restlessness of women, whose excitement, taking manifold forms, competing in games and field sports, adopting professions hitherto closed to them, found expression in a militant agitation for political equality—manifestations which created a profound impression in Germany.

The Suffragettes, no less than Sinn Fein, led the Kaiser to conclude that he had nothing to fear from England.

Lord Kitchener was never, as many other Englishmen were, under the spell of the German Emperor. When her grandson, in spite of his salute to Kruger, furnished Queen Victoria with a plan of campaign against the Boers which had been prepared by the German General Staff, his flamboyant covering letter was acknowledged by her with frigid politeness. The precious document was forwarded to Lord Kitchener, whose reply delighted the Queen by its cool indifference.*

I have no doubt that his wish to be

* Journals.

Ambassador at Constantinople was not based entirely upon the attraction of Eastern politics, but that there was a distinct lure in the prospect of pitting his strength and skill against Germans of the type of Marschall von Bieberstein.

Lord Kitchener's boyish adventure when, evading the immediate consequences of his successful examination at Woolwich, he joined the army of Chanzy on the Loire, had left him with a sentiment for France and an understanding of the French people, whose language he had learnt and cultivated. Had he lived to see the victory of the Allies, and had he succeeded in retaining his high office, which readers of this book may consider doubtful, he would, I feel sure, have supported the principles and forms of the Treaty of Peace, which are believed to be those for which Maréchal Foch has contended.

2

"You cannot have Phocion a friend and a flatterer both."—PLUTARCH.

In the month of June, 1914, a group of Englishmen who for ten years, amid ridicule and contumely, had foretold a world war, became suddenly aware that the pretext had been found by the rulers, soldiers, and professors of modern Germany. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand had been killed at Sarajevo. This group of men were under no illusions about Germany's ambitions, and they had urged in vain their countrymen to make preparations for a war the essence of which would be suddenness, according to the consecrated practice of the great Frederick. But England was unprepared.

For such preparations as were made the country was indebted to Mr. Balfour, who, when Prime Minister, initiated the reorganization of the Army and constituted the Committee of Imperial Defence. Although Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Mr. Asquith completed his work, the honours cannot be denied to Mr. Balfour. To Mr. Asquith the nation owes the redemption of

its honour, for, although he repudiated the assumption of definite agreement with France, he has been credited by the French Ambassador, M. Paul Cambon, with the fixed determination of fulfilling the moral obligation to that country to come to her assistance in case of unprovoked attack when the occasion arose; for the obligation, as Mr. Asquith knew well, was the inevitable sequel to the conversations which had been carried on between the General Staffs of the two Armies for some years. Foch, then but little known in England, had been present in London at some of these conferences, where his influence permeated the discussions of the principal Staff Officers at the War Office. He had also acquired even greater influence over the mind of the Grand-Duke Nicholas of Russia, and had planned with him the opening moves of a defensive war on the Eastern battle-front. Foch's clearness of exposition, his penetrating power of expression, left a mark upon Sir Henry Wilson and other soldiers who met him at the long table in Mr. Disraeli's old drawing-room at Whitehall Gardens, where the meetings of the Defence Committee were held.

During the three years immediately preceding the War, that odd Ministerial breed generated by English faction professed opinions cynically adverse to the group to which Fisher and Lord Roberts, Henry Wilson and Douglas Haig, belonged. The party then in power were never tired of declaiming against these men as thinkers who thought wrong, for it was the strange passion of Liberalism from 1900 to 1914 to dub as militarist a man who ventured to allude to the German menace, and who urged that the nation should prepare to meet it. Even Mr. Lloyd George, whose combative speech at the Guildhall in 1911 struck the first note of defiance to German overallness, scoffed at "alarmists," ridiculed their efforts to awaken the stupid indifference of their country, and treated their warnings as of secondary importance to juggling with Radical finance.

Yet in spite of his dæmonic moods, the passionate phrasing of Mr. Lloyd George's public speeches had already given promise, in the darkest and most evil moments of his political career, that his Welsh patriotic fervour might prove to be the asset to the nation it eventually became.

On the 3rd of August, 1914, what Dr. Newman called "the greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration; the curtain hung over his futurity; the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil," were brought home to every man who observed with pain the irresolution of the Government on the one hand, and on the other the indecent clamour of the London mob inebriated by the prospect of war. It was not surprising, in view of the magnitude of the occasion, that Sir Edward Grey, when he delivered his noble speech at Westminster, should look worn and ill; but he spoke with that vigorous simplicity which is his mental habit, and the House of Commons was deeply moved. Out of twelve colleagues who wished England to remain neutral, Mr. Asquith, whose pluck and patience will some day receive their meed of praise, lost only two, but one of them was John Morley, whose lifelong hatred of war became an imperious factor in the decision he made to separate himself from the Government.

The German invasion of Belgium, although it made no vital difference to the resolve

already taken by Asquith and Grey, preserved the unity of the nation, if not the integrity of the Government. The Opposition leaders, Lord Lansdowne, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. Balfour, by a gesture unusual in the annals of our political history, threw the weight of their support into the balance for the Prime Minister. Strict exaction in the way of public responsibility may demand an adverse judgment on the policy of Ministers who, by an earlier declaration of their moral engagement to France, might have led the rulers of Germany to shrink from precipitating the world into so great a conflict; especially if it can be shown that the certainty of having the whole force of Great Britain thrown into the scale against them would have induced them to pause. When the die was cast, Bethmann Hollweg was gravely impressed by Jules Cambon's farewell and warning words: "Germany is certain to lose the war, for although France may be beaten, there is no chance that you can prevail against *ces deux pouvoirs intangibles, l'Angleterre et la Russie.*"*

* Journals.

But a closer study of what actually happened leads inevitably to the conclusion that the war in which Germany and Austria were to fall by prearranged plan upon France, and after a short and victorious struggle upon Russia, had long been prepared for, with the wholehearted assent of the German nation. However that may be, it is a tragic fact that statecraft, when compressed into Cabinet form, is always lacking in that tranquil persistency and energy which great situations demand.

Having decided to meet their moral obligation to France and to resist the pretensions of Germany, it would have been a simple thing for the English Ministers to leave the fighting to those who had made a lifelong study of its methods. This was the secret of Chatham's success and of his son's failure. The English are naturally a race of seamen, and they have, ever since the days of Elizabeth, refused to allow their political leaders to interfere in war-time with the sea officers of the Admiralty in the composition or handling of fleets. But up to the month of August, 1914, the Army represented to politicians and to the public little more than

a glorified national constabulary, to be employed under civilian direction within or upon the confines of the Empire.

It is doubtful whether the members of Mr. Asquith's Government grasped the magnitude of the struggle into which they were about to plunge. No trace is discoverable, but it is certain that they too believed the War would end within a few months, and their first idea was to fling themselves into it upon a plank of limited liability. Precious hours and days were lost in discussing whether the military engagements to France should be kept in their agreed form; whether a fewer or larger number of Divisions should be sent overseas; or whether none at all should be despatched. The post of Minister for War was practically vacant. After Colonel Seely's recent resignation the place had been occupied temporarily by the Prime Minister, but Mr. Asquith could not continue to hold both offices—so the choice of a War Minister became imperative. At the moment Lord Kitchener was in England, although about to return to his post in Egypt, and, prompted or encouraged by Lord Haldane, then Lord Chancellor, and clamor-

ously pressed by Lord Northcliffe, Mr. Asquith summoned Lord Kitchener to take the vacant office.

The new Secretary of State immediately determined that four Divisions of the Regular Army should proceed to France, to be concentrated on the line previously agreed to by certain General Staff Officers of both nations who had long been discussing the eventuality, and the Cabinet at once assented. Lord Kitchener's name and fame made a moral appeal to the whole nation, and later on to the whole Empire. His career had been unusual, his personality powerful and inscrutable. Although from a distance he had shown some interest in War Office reorganization and the new Territorial schemes, he was ignorant of their details. Some years before he was called to his supreme task and after his surrender of the High Command in India, he had been full of anxiety to understand the temper and character of John Morley, then at the India Office, for his wish was to succeed Lord Minto as Governor-General, and the nomination lay with Morley, who was then Secretary of State for India. A fateful meeting was arranged to take place

between the two men at a private dinner, at which Lord Kitchener, either from shyness or pride, shocked the political sensibilities of his principal host, showed himself at his worst, and ruined in a short hour his prospect of attaining his heart's desire. That night, supposed to be guarded and silent, he was lush of talk, with a copiousness of indiscreet opinion, praise and blame that made Lord Morley say afterwards, "Never, never shall he go to India."*

It was not a simple matter to measure the effect beforehand upon K. of K. of environment or circumstances; for, consciously and unconsciously, he took pleasure in baffling the prophets. Unexpectedly he could be brutal, and as unexpectedly he could be emotional or even tender. It was in one of his mysterious moods that this K. of K., who was looked upon by those who served under him as impenetrable and hard, stood victorious on the spot where Gordon fell, and the sternness and harshness habitual to him was seen to drop from him for the moment, and he was described as being "gentle as a woman."†

* Journals. † Colonel Repington, "Vestigia."

In those days he was erect and slim, with a fine seat on a horse that gave him unusual distinction. Mr. Churchill, young and critical, called him stern and unpitying; a man who treated all men as machines, but who never spared himself; industrious, of undisturbed patience, and of noble perseverance. Others who had even better means of observation have recorded that he was severe on men who failed him, and that those who served him had to succeed, for he took no excuse. He was described as a Commander who was his own Staff Officer—a hater of "channels," who never issued written orders, not even for such operations as those in the Sudan. "Self-sufficiency and verbal orders were his means of exercising command. He hated the written word."*

Like Gordon, he disliked functions, ceremonial, or display of any kind. One of his most eminent colleagues† who had seen much of him in the East said once: "K. is a man who tots you up to see what use you can be to him in the order of things, and puts you right away if he decides you can do him no

* Colonel Repington, "Vestigia."

† Viscount Milner, K.G., Journals.

good. He always looks to the next move, discarding everything he has already accomplished. *Rusé*, like Rhodes."

He was never seen to address or even notice a private soldier. Queen Victoria, who admired and liked him, and who said that his voluminous letters to her from the Sudan were among the best she had in her long experience ever received, was not, in October, 1900, favourably inclined to Lord Roberts's suggestion that Lord Kitchener should go to India as Commander-in-Chief, because she had been told that he "was not good with natives."

As an administrator he proved himself, when in his prime, head and shoulders above his contemporaries. As a soldier he was said to have very slight knowledge of tactics, which he left to his subordinates; and when asked a few days before the Battle of Atbara how he proposed to attack, he replied that he had brought his army 1,500 miles into Africa and had fed it, and that he expected his Generals to do the rest. He was said to have issued only three orders during the fight.*

* Colonel Repington, "Vestigia."

No one knew better than Lord Kitchener his own limitations. Without that delicate adjustment of language which is called wit, he possessed a grim humour of which many stories have been told. Lord Cromer related that in 1898 Lord Kitchener sent him a message saying, "The effect of having killed 30,000 Dervishes is that I have 300,000 women on my hands, and I should be much obliged if you could instruct me how to dispose of them, as I have no use for them myself."* In the Sudan and South Africa, in India and in Egypt, Lord Kitchener had left a reputation far above that of average men for successful handling of difficult problems. He was looked upon as straight and strong. If his range did not go far, if he was wanting in "historic-mindedness," he himself was content with the limits of his knowledge, and he inspired contentment in his countrymen. When Kitchener of Khartoum took control of the War Office on the 5th of August, 1914, there was a sigh of relief, for here was a man in the right place—a man whose antecedents exposed this crucial office to no risks, a man upon whose

* Journals.

tried proficiency the Army and the nation could rely at the moment of greatest trial.

The truth is that Lord K., as he was now called, was faced with a grave dilemma. He was no longer the K. of K. of the Sudan and South Africa, and he only as yet was aware of the tragic fact. Self-reliance, self-sufficiency, hatred of the written word, dislike of functions, the habit of verbal orders, were still a part of his being, but they were ghosts of their old selves. The armour of his soul had rusted; he had noted, if others had not, the corroding traces of the passage of the years. He glanced round the War Office for help, but could find none. Whitehall had been swept clean of soldiers of experience and talent. They had been gathered into the Expeditionary Force overseas, and with the exception of Sir John Cowans, the Q.M.G., he found aged and tired men who trembled before him and his reputation. He was imperfectly informed. He had no knowledge of the organization of the Army or the methods of Parliamentary control, and all that these things mean in the administration of a public office. In this novel sphere he was baffled, and lost confidence in himself.

The governing forces of the situation overwhelmed him, but only his intimate friends guessed what was happening. When he began to try the old methods of doing everything himself—he worked early and late—it was soon clear that the physical strain was breaking down a constitution that was no longer of iron. It is true that he played his part with unfaltering courage. Even when his conclusions were arrived at upon insufficient data, his instincts bred of a desert life were surer than those of his colleagues. But the conditions were not so simple as those to which in the heyday of his fame he had been accustomed. He was no longer breathing in a world of wide spaces, but of narrow streets. At moments his vision could still penetrate far, and his famous dictum on the duration of the War was a case in point. Nor had he ever a doubt as to the main line of attack of the German armies. The French General Staff, disregarding Napoleon's warning, had made a picture of the opening phases of the War. Their plans were based upon it, and to its seductive contours the concentration of their armies conformed. When on the morning of the 13th of August a bevy of

French Staff Officers, shepherded by Colonel Huguet—since a General—left Lord K.'s room at the War Office, after listening to his warning that their appreciation of the military position was mistaken, and their notion of the duration of the War miscalculated, they were sceptical, but impressed by the "justesse" of his reasoning.* His strategical criticism was no surprise to Huguet, who had been for many years Military Attaché in London. Although well acquainted with the ideas of the French High Command, he was not hypnotized by its speculations, and there were some Frenchmen, notably M. Clemenceau, who shared Lord K.'s view as to the direction of the main German advance. Huguet's foresight, his perfect integrity, his tenacity, his unswerving loyalty to France and England, were recognized by devoted friends in London, and nothing was kept secret from him. It was easier for Huguet than for his French companions to grasp and weigh the full intention of Lord K.'s dicta; more particularly as he remembered an axiom which had been flung by Lord K. at the heads of

* Journals.

the Australians some years before: "It is the last and not the first million England can put into the field, that will give us victory."

Just as Lord K. saw things in a truer light from afar off, so his was a figure that loomed larger and in truer perspective at a distance. For this reason his character and aptitudes were more accurately judged by the masses of the people than by his colleagues in the Cabinet. Like many great soldiers, administrators, and visionaries, mingling something of the mystical East with the business habits of the West, he was un-Europeanized and difficult of comprehension to the average official mind. He had been so accustomed to deal with Eastern races that his approach to questions which called for decision was slow, and sometimes tortuous. The sharp legal and political minds of his compeers were repelled by methods so foreign to theirs. Broadspread are the infirmities of human reason, and no politician makes allowance for faults which do not happen to be his. An artist soaring after character in his subject, like Philippe de Champaigne, or illustrating a panoramic scene, like Veronese; a painter

wishing to focus the greater and lesser personalities of the War during the first eighteen months, in true perspective, with dramatic force, could not do otherwise than place the figure of Lord Kitchener in the centre and foreground of his canvas.

Massive, impenetrable, four-square, he was summoned by the unanimous voice of his fellow-countrymen to meet, as best he could, that hurricane, as Lord Morley called it, of destruction and hate that swept quietness out of the world.

II

1

"So long as mankind shall continue to bestow more applause on their destroyers than their benefactors the thirst for military glory will continue to be the vice of the most exalted characters."—GIBBON.

"I AM put here to conduct a great war," said Lord Kitchener, on assuming the office of Secretary of State, "and I have no army."

His clear judgment, unobscured by the opaque mists of Whitehall, discarded the heterogeneous half-trained organization which stood behind that efficient but diminutive body of officers and men which went by the name of the Regular Army. The Reserves were barely sufficient to put the Regular Army into the field and to maintain its numbers through a few weeks of fighting; and behind this first line of battle there was nothing but Territorial troops, composed of half-trained officers and men, by no means up to the strength which could render them effective for war upon such a scale as the

struggle with the Central Powers of Europe was about to demand. He at once decided to raise new armies: and the first figure to shape itself in his mind was a force of thirty Divisions as the minimum he would be likely to require—a figure destined before long to be more than doubled.

Of Territorial troops there were in existence nominally fourteen Divisions, and the soldiers and civilians who had been made responsible for the raising and equipping of this force, and who were naturally proud of their achievement, urged upon Lord Kitchener that precedence should be given to these existing formations in his plan for expanding the Army, and they pressed for all new formations to be raised on a Territorial basis behind them.

But in spite of arguments marshalled with enthusiasm by those who could speak with knowledge of the Territorial troops, supported by Sir Ian Hamilton, who enjoyed his confidence, Lord Kitchener was unconvinced and obdurate. Some intuitive instinct led him to the conclusion that in order to obtain the vast numbers he had in view, as a voluntary offering from the youth of the nation, it was necessary to make a new and

striking appeal upon fresh lines; that the essential point lay in the novelty of the summons he was about to issue. It was thus that "Kitchener's Army" was born; and although many thought him wrong to neglect the established formations, and to reject the methods of raising men provided by the wisdom of his predecessors in office, it is difficult, on retrospect, to question the soundness of the instinct upon which he acted in view of the success he achieved.

Since it was conceded that the War should be fought under a system of voluntary enlistment and unequal sacrifice—a concession for which England was destined to pay, and is still paying, a heavy price—it is more than doubtful whether armies could have been raised by any method other than the one he chose. But these are vain speculations. Lord K. stuck to his own notion—he knew how to wait on circumstances; and the pride and glee with which men of all classes flocked into "Kitchener's Army" amazed the nations of the world. It was impossible to speak with him on the subject and not to realize that he was stirred by the response to his call. Perhaps this quickening of the pulse

made it easier for him to follow his colleagues in their resistance to a fairer way of collecting the youth of the country for the holocaust of battle—resistance fatal to the sober ordering of the nation for the desperate work of provision and supply which lay behind the trenches. Meanwhile such regular troops as were available were rapidly brought from all parts of the Empire.

After the despatch of the six Divisions, for the organization of which Lord Haldane is entitled to the gratitude of his countrymen, the Seventh Division, collected from troops scattered over the Mediterranean area, was sent overseas. Fortunately the German Fleet, for reasons that are still obscure, made no sign; so the transportation of troops to France proceeded without a hitch. Lord K. accepted the decision of the combined General Staffs of the Allies as to the position which the English should occupy, as a truth presented by competent authority. Contrary views were indeed held and expressed. Sir Douglas Haig was unconvinced that the best strategical use was being made of the mobility of the English Army. Sir Spencer Ewart, who had not long before relinquished the

post of Director of Military Operations at the War Office, urged with convincing reasons the formation of a strong bridgehead at Zeebrugge. Thus in these early days accomplished soldiers felt alarm for the security of the Channel Ports. But defective preparation and want of troops allowed no time for discussion of strategy. A plan based upon a false guess at the direction of the German attack was accepted because there was no time to discuss any other. Reinforcement became the absorbing thought, the engrossing topic. Everything — men, material, supplies — everything had to be improvised; and amid all this confusion the peace habit prevailed, and every order had to be issued, every instruction recorded in triplicate and tied up with red-tape. The time had lapsed for examining strategical problems; they must settle themselves, was the optimistic comment; and would obviously do so when the Germans were back beyond the Rhine.

Fortunately for England, at the heart of affairs there was Sir Maurice Hankey—a man whose unwavering confidence in steady preparation for war had led, in what was

called the War Book, to something resembling a national mobilization plan, to meet such a situation as that with which we were confronted. He had adopted and enforced the view that modern war was no longer a tournament, and that a struggle for mastery between nations in arms was a national concern, affecting every branch of national life. So the War Book compiled by the Committee of Imperial Defence under Sir Maurice Hankey's auspices contained warnings, instructions, orders, and guidance, for every Department of State, which, with their assent already obtained, came automatically into operation at the end of what he called the Precautionary Period—that is to say, when war was officially proclaimed and declared. To his foresight and activities are due the tranquil entrance of the nation into the struggle, and that the confusion which followed was not worse confounded. His work was a striking piece of creative art. The creaking and slow grinding of the military machine was not his fault, but the result of a frame of mind which ignored facts and possibilities because they were unpleasant; because the English people had acquired the

habit of acquiescing in the lack of civic courage of their leaders; and because there was not one Minister of State but had been wrong in his forecast and in the advice he had given to his countrymen.

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When Sir John French was chosen to command the Expeditionary Force, no other selection seemed likely or possible. Lord Roberts was over seventy years old. Although Sir John was no longer young, advancing years had not cooled his ardour for fighting. At a crucial moment of his career the command of the Cavalry Brigade at Aldershot became vacant, and the Duke of Cambridge had proposed to Queen Victoria the appointment of a well-known and dashing cavalry officer; but the Adjutant-General, Lord Wolseley, raised objections to the Duke's nomination, and when asked by the Queen to suggest a name, he put forward that of French. The Queen, as her habit was when higher appointments in the Army were under consideration, insisted upon full reasons being submitted to her in support of their views by the Duke and by Lord Wolseley, and finally gave her verdict for

Sir John. It was his first step on the ladder of high promotion and of fame.*

The normal life of a cavalry soldier, its temptations and foibles, savoured by a taste of battle at Abou Klea, found Sir John at the age of forty-six in command of a mounted force sent by Lord Roberts to relieve Kimberley. This service, performed with skill and with complete disregard of conventional tactics, habitual to him, which had won the approval of Lord Wolseley, established his reputation, so that when the South African War ended, his name was in popular estimation linked with those of Roberts and Kitchener. When a few years later he took over the Aldershot Command, it was immediately realized that in the training of troops his talent was not inferior to his leadership of cavalry. His mind broadened and his horizon expanded. He displayed qualities of high command, a grasp of tactical problems, and a strategical insight, hitherto unsuspected. It was noticed that a certain aloofness of demeanour grew upon him, although by nature inclined to comradeship. His rides were companionless and his evenings spent

* Journals.

in solitary musings. Whether training troops at Aldershot as their Commander, or whether as Inspector-General of the Forces taking their measure, he was never free from the haunting obsession of a great war, to which all his powers and faculties were sharpened. This tension of mind in a soldier is a merit and a qualification, so long as the reckless profligacy of war and its withering curse are part of the heritage of humanity.

Originally destined for the Navy, he had passed from a short spell of sea life into the Army. His mind, untrained to study, was closed to the mystery of books, and he was perhaps none the worse for that. At Aldershot his position and duties threw him into the society of men and women different from that to which he had been accustomed. No man in such circumstances can be sure of avoiding mistakes, least of all one who to heroic passions united the heart of a romantic child. Simplicity of character, together with no inconsiderable share of good luck, saved him from shipwreck, and when he was appointed Chief of the General Staff and a Field-Marshal, soldiers hailed the event as the climax of a brilliant career. But for

the first time he found himself misplaced. Harassing details of administration—a parasitic growth on the work of a General Staff—consideration and discussion of unfamiliar questions with more highly equipped minds, finally the mephitic atmosphere of political controversy, diminished his military stature by at least a cubit, and led to consequences so grave that his military life abruptly came to an end. Irish by birth and blood, he fell a victim to the internecine quarrels of his race. Politicians, using flattery and cajolery, lured him to serve their ends. Suddenly and with violence he was swept into the vortex of political faction. Simple and guileless, he believed himself to be a soldier-statesman, when he was in reality exploited by men who made him their dupe. Fortunately for him, at the supreme crisis of his fate two unforeseen events occurred. The Army broke into mutiny, which led to an Augean cleansing of the War Office, and the Austrians despatched an ultimatum to Serbia. Within the space of a few weeks, having left Whitehall under a political cloud, he found himself appointed to command the greatest army ever placed by Great Britain in the field.

Sentimental farewells were followed by departure to the seat of war, surrounded by the soldier companions whose capacity he had in some cases correctly gauged, and in others over-estimated.

In the baffling August days of the great retreat from Mons he displayed the qualities of a leader. Amid conflicting counsels, in straits that tested the mental habits and moral character, he held steadily on, and determined at all hazards to save the British Army. To extricate his force, to escape final disaster, became his main objective; and, as he wrote at the time, he decided to continue the retreat until he could place his army in safety, or, failing this, to concentrate it for one final battle and die among his troops.*

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By an ironic stroke of fate Lord Kitchener and Sir John French, two men temperamentally unsuited, were yoked together to conduct the war in its early stages. Ulysses and Teucer were not more unsympathetic. Trouble came, profound and unexpected, when on the last night of August, 1914, Lord Kitchener, wearing the uniform of a

* Journals.

Field-Marshal, secretly crossed over to France. The story has been told by Sir John himself, and by others, including M. Poincaré, the President of the French Republic. In his room at the War Office, a few hours before he started, Lord K. mentioned his intention and the reason of his mission. A telegram from M. Poincaré had clinched the matter. "My journey is a State secret," he said, using an archaic phrase. It was easy to guess what would happen—a passing embarrassment, a perpetual misunderstanding.*

As a matter of principle, Sir John's contention that his responsibility was to the Cabinet, and to the Cabinet only, was unassailable, and he resented Lord Kitchener's personal intervention. He declined to take orders in the field from anyone, even a Secretary of State and a senior Field-Marshal, and he has since declared that his tactics and decisions were uninfluenced by this famous interview in Paris; that what he had informed Joffre he would do, he did; that events, and not Lord Kitchener's remonstrances, led to the staying of the retreat and to the advance to the Marne in con-

* Journals.

formity with Joffre's orders. M. Poincaré's view that the "misunderstanding was then very serious," and that its removal was due "for the most part to Lord Kitchener," although it is not reconcilable with Sir John French's account of these episodes, has never been questioned in France or England by anyone who was aware of what passed during those critical hours, and Lord Kitchener is entitled to a prominent place among those, including Galliéni and Foch, who contributed to the success of Joffre in the Battle of the Marne. That Lord Kitchener's visit to Paris led to a breach that was never quite healed, between two soldiers of signal public virtue, cannot be questioned, although the more tolerant temper of Lord K. never felt the umbrage that on many subsequent occasions he unintentionally gave.

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It was by slow and painful steps that the High Command in the Field and Lord Kitchener at home came to realize the novel conditions under which the War was being fought. They were startled by the huge demands made upon personnel and material, having been accustomed to envisage circum-

stances imposed by previous experiences which had no relation to those prevailing on the Aisne in September, 1914. Too exclusive attention has been paid to the later phases of the War, even by those who recollect its beginnings, to render easy the remembrance of those problems facing the soldiers and administrators, which then appeared stupendous, but which were dwarfed by the still greater demands made upon the English nation in subsequent years.

The scene on the Aisne was very different from that to which in Artois, Picardy, and Flanders men became accustomed. From Paris—a forlorn city deserted by its Government and by the British Embassy, its railway-stations crowded by hungry refugees—the road to the Front lay through the Marne battlefield; over the temporary bridge at La Ferté, where the crossing of our troops had been checked by German machine-guns cleverly concealed in the upper storeys of riverside houses; through woods still containing many German stragglers, along roads littered with dead, to Château Thierry, and thence to the little town of La Fère-en-Tardennois, typical of many small French

country towns, with its market-place stacked with British motor-cars, and its historic castle-palace, reminiscent of Montmorency, commandeered by British Staff Officers.*

At La Fère there were all the signs and accompaniments of a war of movement, for trench warfare had not yet reached the static stage it subsequently assumed. Sir John French occupied a small but gaudily furnished house, belonging to a Préfet or Sous-Préfet. His mess was in sharp contrast to the trappings of the house—primitively simple, a bare table and plain fare. On the door of the bedrooms were the names in chalk of the German officers who had vacated them a few days previously. Round the house were the tents and field-kitchens of the detachment of Camerons who were the Commander-in-Chief's bodyguard.†

During the pause between the Marne battle and the move to the Yser, Sir John and his Chief of the General Staff, Archibald Murray, made the first urgent demands for machine-guns and ammunition in numbers and quantities, which, when they were received in London, appeared to Lord Kitchener and

* Journals. † *Ibid.*

his technical officers beyond all reasonable requirements. If the regulation allowance of two machine-guns to a battalion of infantry was unequal to the necessities of this extraordinary war, there was a limit which reason demanded should be imposed, especially by cool-headed men who had not faced batteries of these deadly instruments of modern fighting in German hands. For the War Office was not yet awake to the novel picture of war which the Aisne presented. On the high banks of the river English soldiers were getting their first taste of that trench warfare which became for years the governing condition of their struggle, but no one in Whitehall had any vision of the undulating downs which led upwards to the woods lying in patches on the steep rocky slopes above the Aisne, where the battlefield lay. No one at the War Office had seen in the dim morning light the camp-fires and bivouacs of Franchet d'Esperey's Algerians on the right of Sir John's army, or the sun rising over a battlefield which, though it recalled in some respects the romantic pictures of Horace Vernet, and was beautiful with the beauty that distinguishes certain aspects of war,

differed totally from anything they had seen or foreseen.*

In this, as in all war, its appanage, the picturesque costume of its votaries, its groupings of youth amid the atmospheric loveliness of misty landscape, its sacrificial appeal and its great rewards, which render illusory the hopes of those who desire to end it, were not absent; but its heavy demands upon the resources of the people left behind, and above all upon the imagination of those whose business it was to guide them, were as yet unrealized.

Sir John French, in his account of 1914, has said that no previous experience, no conclusion he had been able to draw from campaigns in which he had taken part, or from a study of new conditions, had led him to anticipate a war of positions. "I cannot help wondering," he said, "why none of us realized what the modern rifle, the machine-gun, motor traction, the aeroplane, and wireless telegraphy, would bring about." By the 24th of September, 1914, he had begun to realize all these things, and to see that war had passed into a novel phase, and that his

* Journals.

army was badly equipped with modern instruments of fighting.

How unfruitful is the study of previous campaigns unaccompanied by vision of scientific developments is illustrated by Sir John's reflections, when we recall that some years before this date a civilian who had closely studied modern war, a Swiss publicist, prophesied in elaborate detail the trench warfare of the Western Front, its static conditions, and explained the reasons for the conclusions he had formed. Although this man's book received much attention at the time of its issue, and his theories were given wide publicity, military opinion, except that of Lord Roberts, was hermetically closed against his arguments. But Lord Roberts, in spite of his seventy years, had preserved a mind which, though eager in convictions, was singularly open to novel ideas and new impressions. The average English soldier before and after 1640 has invariably shown himself indifferent to military conceptions unless based on past military experience. In view of the next great war, all military training is no doubt strictly conforming to the experience gained in the last, and one may be sure that

young soldiers are being taught, at Aldershot and elsewhere, manœuvres and tactics based upon 1916-18, while their Staff Officers are stereotyping deductions drawn from the same experiences; and yet science, sleepless, restless, and evolutionary, is exploring every day new methods of destruction, and opening up avenues to novel tactics, rendering certain that war in the future will be waged with weapons hitherto undreamed of, fought in the air and under the water, by contrivances which will render those of 1918 as obsolete as gunpowder rendered bows and bills.

In 1914 the Army Regulations, based on South African experience, prescribed two machine-guns for each battalion of infantry, yet the German machine batteries could, and did, at Le Cateau and La Ferté, fight actions for many hours unsupported by any infantry at all, while the high-explosive shell, so far as the British Army was concerned, was non-existent. But so tenacious is every military hierarchy of its theories, that it took months and immense losses of life before the lessons of August and September, 1914, were brought home to the minds of the distinguished officers to whose advice Lord Kitchener

listened, and to the mind of Lord Kitchener himself.

The French, more alert, had soon realized the necessity of massed machine-guns, of howitzers of large calibre, and of high-explosive shell, and by the month of December, 1914, at M. Millerand's and General Galliéni's instance, the motor and other private factories, notably Renault's, which had been converted into munition works, had been reported on to Lord K. with an exposition of the procedure of converting plant in these factories to its new uses, its cost and the result obtained. Although French officers were keen to explain the growth of their munition factories to Lord K. and his experts, the Department of Master-General of the Ordnance in London, which contained conscientious and capable people, was bemused by the magnitude of what it had accomplished, and neglected an offer which contained a great opportunity. Throughout the War Office there was a curious lack of imagination and flexibility, while Lord Kitchener, concentrated on the task of raising men for his new armies, harassed by Cabinet meetings and disputations to which

he was unaccustomed and for which he was unsuited, yielded his judgment to "official figures" and accepted the critical Memoranda of the War Office Staff upon the requirements of the Commander-in-Chief in the Field. It was this frame of mind which prevailed throughout the office in Whitehall that ultimately led to changes of far-reaching character in the government of the country and in the conduct of the War, and provoked in certain minds bitter antagonism against Lord K. himself.

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During the last few months of 1914 English officers and men began slowly to understand the difference in training, tactics, and mentality between the Allied Armies. No man could resemble less an English Divisional General than Franchet d'Esperey, a typical Gallic soldier; no troops could be less like the English Guards than the men he commanded. Colonel Huguet, too*—a Frenchman of a very different type, a wholly attractive character, but utterly unlike his British companions—was Head of the French Mission,

* Now a General.

and in constant touch with Sir John's H.Q. Staff. Huguet had been Military Attaché in London for many years, and had formed strong friendships with Englishmen which stood France and England in good stead. From 1904 to 1905, when the first "conversations" took shape, which led ultimately to the presence of the British Expeditionary Force in France, Huguet's qualities as a soldier and as a diplomatist first became apparent. As the Head of the French Mission with Sir John, his breadth of judgment earned anew the respect of the Staff Officers who were brought in contact with him. He was often criticized by the English for his advocacy of the wishes of his own military Chiefs, while he was oftener blamed by his own compatriots for being "too English." No higher tribute to his worth as a *Chef de Mission* could have been paid to him. He was succeeded, on his appointment as General in command of an Artillery Brigade, by at least one capable and popular officer, who fell later in the War at the head of his Division, but Huguet was never replaced. Upon his face the events of the month of August had left deep lines of anxiety, but they softened

when he spoke of the debt which the Army owed to the undaunted spirit and unshakable determination of Sir Douglas Haig and his First Corps, while he could hardly find adequate words to convey his sense of the services Henry Wilson had rendered to the H.Q. Staff during the retreat from Mons.* Complete concord and real interchange of ideas with the French Commanders and their Staffs took many long months, and some sad experiences, to accomplish, but the foundations of both were laid in those early days on the Aisne, thanks to the determination of this tolerant Frenchman and to the humorous Irish insight of Henry Wilson.

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There were other lessons which in the early stages of the struggle were as yet unlearnt by those whose duties lay far from the battle, but whose responsibilities for its successful issue were not less than those of the men fighting in the line itself.

The experiences of previous wars, notably in South Africa, had stereotyped the Field Service Regulations for the Royal Army Medical Corps. Its legacy was a set of iron

* Journals.

rules which Medical Officers in the Field were powerless to amend either by appeals to the Adjutant-General at Head-Quarters, who was their official Chief, or by private representation to the War Office, where no one could be got to visualize the scenes then being enacted in France.

From the casualty stations to churches and barns, where they lay for days, and thence to railhead at Château-Thierry, the wounded were borne in jolting Army Service Corps waggons. The transit took in the ordinary way about twelve hours. Often men were left for a day and a half lying on straw, with their field-dressings unchanged, or they lay on stretchers in the broiling sun on railway-platforms with a few tired orderlies to look after them until they could be lifted off and piled into horse-boxes and cattle-trucks. It took from three to five days before a sufferer could possibly reach a Base hospital. In those days there was not one motor ambulance in the advanced zone of the British Army, and only one available for the British military hospital at Versailles. Although the British Red Cross Society had offered to send two hundred motor ambulances for service at the

Front, the offer had been refused. Not a nurse was allowed on the railway-platforms at any station during the long halting journey from Château-Thierry to the Base. Although the British Red Cross Society had offered to send a thousand trained nurses to France, many of whom could have been stationed on our lines of communication, the offer had been refused.*

There was one bright spot in this tragedy of pain. To Villeneuve St-Georges there came to meet every train of wounded ten motor ambulances from the American hospital at Neuilly. The American surgeon in charge selected the most dangerous cases, and in less than an hour they were in bed in one of the most admirably equipped hospitals in France. The British Red Cross offered to open any hospitals required in Paris, and Dr. Garrett Anderson and her staff of women, Rachel Lady Dudley with her fully equipped Australian hospital, the Duchess of Westminster and others, were waiting in France, forbidden to unpack. No Red Cross aid was required beyond Rouen. That was a decision from which there was apparently

* Journals.

no appeal. When these facts were reported to Lord Kitchener,* when he was told that every statement could be corroborated by Sir Alfred Keogh, at that time Commissioner of the B.R.C., who was kicking his heels in Paris, as well as by Lord Robert Cecil, who rendered invaluable assistance and advice, he was deeply angry. Some who were present at the War Office on that occasion for the first time saw the old K. of K. in action. Within a few moments of becoming acquainted of all these facts he rang his bell and summoned the acting Head of the R.A.M.C. (the Director-General, Sir Arthur Sloggett, who afterwards filled with great distinction that office in the field, being seriously ill), and in short, sharp sentences, without question or comment, issued verbal instructions ordering the Red Cross hospitals to be freed, and granting every request which the British Red Cross had made. Within a few hours Sir Alfred Keogh had been recalled from France, and appointed Director-General of Medical Services at the War Office, and from that moment dates the efficiency to which

* A joint Report by Lord Esher and Colonel Netterville Barron, C.M.G.

the Royal Army Medical Corps attained, thanks to the liberal policy of its chiefs in London and at G.H.Q.* With Sir Arthur Stanley and the British Red Cross Sir Alfred Keogh worked hand in hand, and he never refused help when offered by organizations or individuals unless reason for doing so could be given which, if necessary, could have been justified in public.

What would have taken any other Secretary of State ever known or imagined, days of reflection over files of Memoranda, possibly followed by the appointment of Committees of investigation, was done in a flash by the ringing of a bell and a word of command. He was on that day the Kitchener of Khartoum, whom his political colleagues never saw, but who for the first year of the War stood between them and disaster.

2

"Le monde finit toujours par condamner ceux qu'il accuse."

If Lord Kitchener and the men round him at the War Office were slow to grasp the requirements of the Commander-in-Chief in

* Sir Alfred Keogh and Sir Arthur Sloggett.

the Field, Lord Kitchener was quick enough to understand the country's primary need, and to set about its fulfilment.

The military transformation of the old Regular into a new National Army was his achievement and his alone, for he neither asked nor took the advice of any man. In Sir Charles Douglas, his Chief of the General Staff, he possessed an officer of long experience and sound judgment. An old Gordon Highlander, he had worked his way up by sheer merit through every regimental grade to the highest Staff appointment. The mysteries of Army organization and the Field Service Regulations were at his fingers' ends. He chafed under Lord K.'s disorganizing methods and his incurable habit of putting square men and things into round holes. He could not realize that the vigorous push of this herculean personality nine times out of ten squared the hole or rounded the object. In the first blush of the War's enthusiasms Sir Charles Douglas endeavoured to wrestle with Lord K.'s ignorance of Army organization and indifference to War Office regulations, but he soon abandoned the effort in despair.

Lord K. knew nothing of the Territorial

Force, its organization or origin. In his eyes they were the old Volunteers whom he remembered to have seen drilling on Saturday afternoons in Hyde Park, or marching out to Wimbledon Common. Of the Territorial Associations he had not heard, and he smiled grimly at the notion that these "Saturday-afternoon warriors" were organized in Brigades and Divisions, and that they possessed real Artillery horses and Army Service Corps waggons. As for Engineers, there was a Corps of Royal Engineers of which he was himself a member, and he knew of Civil Engineers, but of no others.

The little group of officers who stood nearest him at the War Office, actuated by hopes that they could persuade him to conform to existing organizations, soon discovered how mediocre was their capacity of persuasion. He neither argued nor discussed; he simply ignored. And yet he liked and respected his subordinates, and resented criticism directed against them. Although a few members of this small group gave expression to their views, notably General Callwell, whom Lord K. frequently praised and quoted, the majority feared him, and trembled in his presence.

Only a few realized that there were ways of handling his dangerous caprices. Like the "Birdie" so often tenderly mentioned by Lord K., and who in the process became a legendary figure of everything that a Staff Officer should be, Sir Ian Hamilton understood him well, and it was largely due to Sir Ian's tact that after heated discussions, during which Lord K. looked doggedly on, the Territorial troops were dribbled oversea in battalions. He could not be induced to take seriously the proposition that they should be used in the Divisional formations which already existed, although he consented that one Division of infantry should be specially formed out of units selected by his Inspectors, as a test of efficiency. He would not hear of what was called a Haldane Division going to France *en bloc*. He was later induced to change his mind, after he had heard from Sir John French of the satisfactory behaviour of the London Scottish and other picked battalions, and then he agreed to place the North Midland and Second London Divisions (47th) under orders for service overseas.

His heart was in the new armies which already men called by his name. The raising

of them was a task after his own inclinations, for it was so characteristically like the old K. of K. to go abroad sowing dragon's teeth, and watching soldiers—unfortunately unarmed and unequipped—spring to life. London began to be covered with posters and appeals upon which his name and strong face appeared. The flame kindled in Whitehall spread over the kingdom, and men flocked in tens of thousands to the recruiting offices. The medical profession was rent by the necessary inspection of aspirants to the fame of joining Kitchener's Army. Factories broke down in the vain attempt to clothe them, and like the Hebrew prophet, a K. recruit was currently believed to be fed by ravens. They drilled with umbrellas in lieu of rifles, and artillery horses drew pantomimic guns made of wood or papier-mâché. The disorganization was complete; and yet from this chaos there arose unit after unit, Division after Division, until the country was covered from end to end with camps and drilling youths. There was plenty of captious criticism, for the heavy anxieties of the time made men captious, and there are still persons who believe Lord Kitchener chose wrong means for the miracle

he wrought; but there are others with a faculty for clenching tangible truths, who are quietly disposed to think that England was lucky at that crucial moment of political instability to find at her call this consummate disorganizer and master of the art of improvisation.

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During the early months of the War Lord Kitchener lived in Carlton Gardens, where Lady Wantage had placed a house at his disposal. His habits were regular and simple. Punctually at nine his massive figure, in the blue undress uniform of a Field-Marshal which he at that time wore, was seen ascending the stairway of the War Office. His writing-table was at the far end of the Secretary of State's room, between the fire and the window. There hour after hour he sat, his large tortoiseshell spectacles gleaming over his work, baffling weary officials, who stood in his presence. He was rarely home before eight o'clock, and his labours were not then finished. They were strenuous days for a man no longer young, and of Eastern training and habits. He ate little, and, following the King's example, had banished alcohol

from his table; but in spite of abstinence and anxiety he seemed to grow heavier, and as time went on the long strain told upon him. But there were incidents, which to others with less nerve would have mattered, that he treated lightly. One night he was in bed asleep, when Mr. Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, bursting into the room, pleaded for the War Minister's permission to leave at once for Antwerp. In spite of the late hour, Sir Edward Grey arrived in the middle of the discussion, and while he was engaging Lord Kitchener's attention Mr. Churchill slipped away. He was next heard of when a telegram from Antwerp was put into Lord K.'s hands in which his impetuous colleague asked bravely to be allowed to resign his great office, to be given the command of a Naval Brigade, and pleading that reinforcements should be hurried out to those "forlorn and lonely men," as he called them, who were vainly trying to hold on to the Antwerp lines. Lord K. was not upset, but he was not unmoved. Upon the issue whether it was better to have tried and failed at the instance of this whimsical genius, whose pride could not endure the desertion

of the little Belgian Army, fair judgment is unlikely to be delivered by his contemporaries. Sir John French has lifted a corner of the veil which hides these transactions. Winston Churchill's attempt was given a poor chance. Under six Commanders-in-Chief—for there were at least six—not even the Guards Division could have effected the relief of Antwerp.*

In spite of that tragic failure the Channel Ports were now covered by the British Army, and men's hearts were lighter, until during the latter half of October, 1914, there was a reaction against the growing optimism. While the first Battle of Ypres was running its course, nothing but pure unreason could have expected more than to avert defeat. Sir John French has told the story of that critical battle and of that crucial day, the 31st of October, when only the cool resource of Douglas Haig and the miraculous rally of the Worcesters saved the armies of England and France from a disaster that might have proved irreparable. There were few more

* I was in France at that time, and out of close touch with Lord K., so I know nothing of the part he took, or failed to take, in these transactions.

dangerous moments during the course of the War. It was in the days which followed the opening of the Battle of Ypres that Lord K. repeated his conviction as to the length of the War's duration. He pointed out how the prophecies of politicians and soldiers had been falsified. How could it be supposed, he asked, that a nation of sixty-five millions, highly organized as Germany was, would be beaten to its knees under years of fighting? Her internal resources, her food-supplies, her man-power, had all been worked out, and showed large margins, far beyond those of the North in the American Civil War, and it was certain that before relinquishing the struggle Germany would exhaust every possible supply of material and men.*

Lord K.'s vision was clear, but he was aware of his impotence when trying to convince or control his colleagues in the Government. He had realized quickly the fatal drawback of a Cabinet of twenty-three, and although he knew nothing of Chatham, he would have welcomed Mr. Asquith's dictatorship with himself on his left hand and on his right Lord Fisher, who had succeeded that

* Journals.

great gentleman and fine sea officer Prince Louis of Battenberg as First Sea Lord. But you walked away from Lord K.'s room feeling that although our system of conducting a great war was misguided and he knew it, yet he was no longer the K. of K. qualified to find a remedy. Cromwell was forty-six years of age when he changed the Government of England, and had Lord K. been able to divest himself of twenty years, had he been the lithe, wiry horseman of the Sudan, the control and course of the War might have taken a different shape. But his figure had grown heavy; his face had lost its outline; he was over sixty-five years old. He knew well, to use Napoleon's phrase, that the Cabinet of twenty-three thought about war as a blind man might think about colour. But he was not Napoleon, and a lifelong habit of independent command, subject always to the military habit of discipline, had rendered him incapable of collective action on the one hand, or of political insubordination on the other. Later on, a very different man, of very different temperament, revived in some degree the precedent of Chatham and of the Seven Years' War.

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While Lord Kitchener's deep-rooted interest had gathered, perhaps too exclusively, round the raising of his armies, in the centre of the storm the scene had changed.

Sir John French's Head-Quarters at St. Omer were very different from La Fère-en-Tardennois. The hollow in the downs in which St. Omer, with its group of Gothic churches, stands, was full of historic interest for Englishmen and English soldiers. Sir John's quarters were in the main cobbled street, in a plain house which belonged to a notary, furnished in the usual flamboyant style. Sir John had stood well the prolonged strain of the Battle of Ypres, its crises and poignant losses; but his naturally suspicious, impulsive nature made him an easy prey to mischief and gossip. There was some fabulous story current that Lord K., on a recent visit to France, had said to General Joffre: "If you cannot get on with the Field-Marshal, I can replace him by an equally good soldier," naming Sir Ian Hamilton. The myth had met with ready credence, and helped to embitter relations where good-fellowship was of such importance.

The scene in Picardy and Flanders bore no resemblance to that on the Aisne only a month

before. An Expeditionary Force had been transformed into an army and a war of movement into a siege. The steep banks of the Aisne had been changed for the spreading flats of the Yser, with the old Flemish town of Ypres as the prize of battle. Men watched the sun setting in brilliant orange skies, with great lemon patches of cloud gathered over the famous Cloth Hall, then hardly injured in comparison to the shapeless ruin of after-years, and they gloried in the tenacity of the soldiers who had resisted the enemy's furious attack.

In Poperinghe lay a remnant of the old army—Household cavalry, officers and men, asleep on straw in the kitchens of peasant homes; the villagers sitting upright on the floor backed against the walls; here and there a well-known boyish face peeping above the litter.* Trains of wounded passed seaward, no longer in the cattle-trucks of the Aisne, but in well-ordered carriages with nurses and proper appliances; motor ambulances in great numbers were at the service of the wounded men—a contrast to the one solitary ambulance between Versailles and Villeneuve St-Georges,

* Journals.

not quite two months before. Round St. Omer were encamped batches of Territorials, undergoing a hardening process, getting accustomed to the booming of heavy guns. Aeroplanes, then in their adolescence, were occasionally to be seen, hunted by little white puffs of exploding shrapnel.

Amid these surroundings, Lord Kitchener's old chief, Lord Roberts, died. He had spent his last days as Sir John French's guest, visiting the Army he loved. "In the name of His Majesty's Army serving in France," thus ran Sir John's message to Lady Roberts, "I wish to be allowed to convey to you and your family our heartfelt sympathy. Your grief is shared by us, who mourn the loss of a much-loved chief. As he was called, it seems a fitter ending to the life of so great a soldier that he should have passed away in the midst of the troops he loved so well, and within the sound of the guns."

His death left Lord Kitchener unchallenged, the first soldier of the Empire. Lord Roberts's love for India was a passion. England and India, for India typified in his eyes the highest virtues of our race—virtues to be found in the soldier heroes and administrators, from Nichol-

son, in whose great company his life began, to the young men he left behind forty years later when he quitted her shores. He was deeply attached to the common soldier. Duty was the secret conviction of his conscience; he was a soldier of uncommon width of views; his mind to the last was open to new impressions; he was bold and prompt in council—energetic without haste—faithful to the friends he loved, and who loved him. To his Sovereign and his country he dedicated every beat of his great little heart.

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About this time a periodical scare of invasion, a possibility Lord Kitchener had never scouted, swept over the country. Serious soldiers believed in its likelihood and feasibility, in spite of the negative findings of the Committee of Imperial Defence a few years previously, to which Lord Roberts and those who agreed with him had not subscribed. Lord Kitchener used to say that if he were in command of the German armies, his strategy would not exclude an attempt at invasion;* and in November, 1914, naval and military movements at Wilhelmshaven, coin-

* Journals.

ciding with a new moon and high tides which rendered the waters deepest in the Kiel Canal and the harbours of the coast, gave rise to rumours that raids by the enemy in force were intended. People on the coast of Sussex and Kent began to talk of the High Sea Fleet and flat-bottomed boats much as their grandparents talked of Villeneuve and of the army of Boulogne a century ago. If the German High Command desired to check the flow of troops to France, and to strengthen the hands of those who were bent on retaining considerable forces for Home Defence, they succeeded.

Besides anxieties at home and on the Western Front, Lord Kitchener had now two, if not three, subsidiary wars on his hands. Thanks to a ludicrous anachronistic system which had grown up since 1815, the Foreign and Colonial Offices had been accustomed to wage little wars on their own responsibility, calling upon the Secretary of State for War when they found his assistance indispensable. This absurdity was now abandoned, for the Cabinet was beginning to understand that for a world-wide struggle concentrated action was called for whenever

it was feasible without trenching upon the collective *amour-propre* of the twenty-three Ministers of whom the Cabinet was composed.

In quiet moments which he stole from administrative labours that he was temperamentally unable to delegate, Lord Kitchener began to cast about for sources of success in a wider area, and he began to see his way towards handling the military problem as he had seen it from the first day of the War, with a continuous front line stretching from Ostend to Kurachi.

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In December Sir John French crossed the Channel for the first time since August. His visit to Lord Kitchener was kept secret, but, like most secrets throughout the War, was the talk of the town. Sir John's cheerful optimism Lord K. found "refreshing," and for a while misunderstandings between the Commander-in-Chief and the Secretary of State were removed. They agreed in deploring the want of co-operation between the Navy, the Army, and the Foreign Office, and although the Expeditionary Force had been doubled (for in November, 1914, there were twelve British Divisions in France),

Lord Kitchener, balancing the opposing forces as best he was able, promised Sir John early reinforcements.

There was, however, a grave matter that without embitterment did not admit of discussion between them. The Staff work of the British and French armies was not co-ordinated, and in spite of the efforts of liaison officers, English and French, especially of Colonel Sidney Clive and his subordinates, the General Staffs of the two armies were lacking in that close sympathy which Huguet had established in the years preceding the War. The relations between Sir John French and General Joffre, although more friendly than rumour would allow, were wanting in that unity which is essential to the maximum application of force. The problem of obtaining intimate touch with Russia appeared to be insoluble, partly owing to the distances to be traversed, but mainly to the reserved, intractable character of the Grand-Duke Nicholas.

Ever since the time when Von Kluck threatened Noyon and the consequent flight of M. Viviani's Government, accompanied by the British Ambassador and the Embassy

Staff, to Bordeaux, the English and French people had been taught by civilian strategists to look to Russia for relief from the enemy's pressure on the Western Front. Long after Manoury's battle on the Ourcq had stayed the German rush to Paris, and the War had been transmuted into a war of positions, leaving some of the richest provinces of France in German hands, the masses of the French soldiery believed in the inevitable and victorious advance of their Russian Allies, "pourvu que les civils tiennent."*

Then French people had not yet realized that English ships had swept the oceans of the world clear of German commerce, and that the enemy's fleet, though still a menace, was harbour-locked, and that there were millions of men of English blood on the way to their assistance.

They, too, looked to the Russian "steam-roller"—a term whose origin was English, but in translation had passed quickly from the Paris boulevard to the provinces of France.

A student of Russian mentality, dipping for enlightenment into Russian literature

* Forain's celebrated cartoon.

rather than into Ambassadorial reports, might have quoted, from Turgeniev and Tolstoy, passages which would have damped hopes based upon the constancy of the Russian Government or of the Russian people. He would have explained that mysticism and corruption had for over a hundred years, from Tilsit to the Crimea, and from Sevastopol to Manchuria, rendered groundless the hopes of those who relied on the stability of Russia.

As the conviction that help could come only from their Russian Allies began to waver, the French soldiers and the French people, as they lost hope, turned, not to the English armies or the English nation, but to the one Englishman whose name they knew. Joffre's portrait—Papa Joffre, as he was called—was to be found in peasant homes from the Vosges to the Pyrenees, but now another name began to be coupled with that of the hero of the Marne. French men and women who had never heard of Viviani, spoke of Kitchener, and his name and fame swept through France in 1915, as it had through England in 1914, like a whisper through an Eastern bazaar. The juxtaposition of these two names was the nearest approach to

solidarity reached by the Allied Armies and peoples until the first attacks on the Somme in July, 1916.

Lord Kitchener knew that there were shrewd and experienced men in Paris and at the Grand Quartier Général, who had already discounted the value of the Russian armies. But the conclusion was strange and repugnant to him, so that he preferred to turn optimistically to Sir H. Howard's Mission, and to the will-o'-the-wisp of detaching the Emperor Franz Joseph from his ally. He joined gladly in the search for reinforcement and new alliances, approving the French diplomatists who were negotiating directly with Italy and coquetting with Roumania. He never overlooked the advantages of diversion and surprise, much as he valued and praised the fortitude and stoutness with which the combat on the Western Front was waged by both armies.

After six months of static warfare, the moment had arrived when its meaning and prospects required to be summarized and its stern facts faced. There was fruitful field for deduction and even suggestion if the object was to endeavour to utilize fully the factors in the struggle between the peoples already engaged

and about to engage in the War. Lord Kitchener encouraged discussion of these matters, although he received no credit for doing so, and it was in connection with them that he frequently alluded to the assistance he had received from his subordinates, although his inveterate habit of apparent disagreement when he either agreed or had formed no opinion at all—a habit he shared with the late Duke of Devonshire—may never have given any of the War Office Staff a true idea of his appreciation of their capacity.

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Already in the month of January, 1915, new strategical schemes were afoot in the arcana of the Cabinet. They were mostly in the nature of *ballons d'essai*. Sir John French was being urged to consider an attack on Zeebrugge in combination with the Navy, the idea being to remove the menace of Zeebrugge and Ostend, which a few months earlier might have been accomplished easily, but now presented formidable difficulties. This project provoked differences of opinion which were not confined to English politicians and soldiers, for General Joffre viewed with disfavour the consequential diversion of troops for which he had other uses

that appeared to him and the Grand Quartier Général of greater importance. Incidentally the method of despatching the new armies to France arose out of these discussions, and led to a divergence of views between Lord Kitchener and the Commander-in-Chief.

Lord Kitchener had determined to continue the training of his new armies at home, and when they were reported to him as fit for service in the field, to despatch them to France in large formations, as armies of two or more corps under a Commander selected by himself; but Sir John French was opposed to this plan, and based his objection on the importance of keeping the allocation of fresh troops under his own control. He wished the new armies to be sent to him in smaller formations, not larger than Divisions, so that he could mix them as required with seasoned troops, leaving himself free to form them into corps or armies as the occasion required. The awkwardness of this difference of opinion lay in the fear that Lord Kitchener might be inclined to postpone the despatch of reinforcements, or deflect them to some other theatre of war, and although his self-command and equitable judgment might have been relied upon to do what was best, this deduction

was not obvious amid the ferment of the dispute.

Another practical matter in hand at the moment was the necessity of selecting a successor to Sir John's Chief of the General Staff; Sir Archibald Murray, an officer of high accomplishments, had been chosen by Sir John himself at the outbreak of the War, a choice of which he had never repented during all those months of profound anxiety and high pressure. But Murray's health, never vigorous, had for some time shown signs of failing, and it was felt that he could render more valuable services, thanks to his natural gifts and war experience, if he were to be transferred to the War Office. When Sir John claimed the right to nominate his successor, and urged the importance to a Commander in the Field of having at his right hand a Staff Officer of his own selection, his claim was not admitted by Lord Kitchener or the Prime Minister. Sir John was reminded that Wellington, at the height of his success in the Peninsula—even on the eve of Waterloo—was unable to assert this privilege, was refused officers he asked for, and constantly found officers forced upon him whom he disapproved of and even cordially disliked. The truth was

that Sir John was determined, if he could manage it, that Sir Henry Wilson should succeed Murray. Henry Wilson possessed not only a delightful Irish personality, but an independence of judgment and outlook which, together with a certain mastery of their language, appealed to the French. To this Sir John attached great importance. The French knew that Henry Wilson, before and since the War began, had been closely working with Huguet, and that he was in excellent personal relations with General Foch. For years Huguet and Henry Wilson had, in their different spheres, endeavoured to prepare their respective Governments for a combined defensive war which Huguet feared and Henry Wilson believed to be inevitable. The younger man's vision was the clearer of the two. From the Surrey village where, as Head of the Staff College, he taught the principles of war, his pupils went forth imbued with a sense of its cataclysmic imminence. Below the ascending woods where he so often stood, there lay before his mind's eye, in lieu of cricket-fields and polo-grounds, curving reaches of the Meuse and bloodstained flats of Flanders. Day by day he visualized a German inrush, and calculated to an hour the

crucial moment at which six British Divisions could be brought shoulder to shoulder with their French Allies between Mons and Namur.

When others prattled of peace, he prepared young men's souls for war, not for an indefinite war, as men barricade their doors against imaginary thieves, but for a specific struggle with the German nations, the early stages of which he foresaw in detail with a soldier's insight. His Irish blood, exuberant with combative malice, in an unfortunate moment seduced him from the arid paths of military science. He plunged with delight into an Irish quarrel, which earned for him from politicians the appellation of "a pestilential fellow," and was destined to cripple his chances of obtaining the highest Staff appointment in a war which he had correctly appreciated. The implacable wrath of political partisans stood between him and the fullest use of his faculties in the war of his waking dreams. For this he had himself and his Irish ancestors to blame.

However, chance favoured him, and his military worth stood revealed to the Commander-in-Chief. During the retreat from Mons all the resources of courage, good sense, stinging wit, and uproarious Irish mirth of

which he was possessed, had been placed torrentially at the service of the Army and its chief. In his vicinity no heart quailed, and before his caustic glee in battle men's tired spirits revived. When the climax of disaster came, authority seemed naturally to slip into his hands. His comrades, French and English, recalled with affectionate admiration how, at St. Quentin, when fatigue, depression, and the encircling foe had brought strong men to the point of collapse, a gaunt figure, scantily clothed, laughed through the night hours, absorbing every item of information, taking advantage of every military point, urging the peasantry to be helpful and the English soldiers to stand firm. Even here his prescience never failed. In that darkest hour he is recorded to have said: "The Germans are overhasty. They urge the pursuit too fast. The whole thing is overdone. They are bound to make a big mistake, and then your hour will have come." Already he had divined the Battle of the Marne.

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But the Government was determined to replace Murray by General Robertson, who had earned the admiration and respect of the

whole army in the field by his work as Quarter-master-General, a craft in which he had shown himself an adept; so that when his appointment was definitely made, it was popular not only with all ranks of the Army, but with the public, who had watched his professional rise from the position of a private soldier with sympathy and admiration. Sir William Robertson brought with him, as Director of Military Operations, Sir Frederick Maurice, a Staff Officer of rare distinction, and the combined activities of these two able men left an indelible impression on the issue of the War.

III

1

"We cannot trust the characters of history unless they are drawn by those who knew their persons."—Dr. Johnson.

Early in January, 1915, the French Government, accompanied by the British Embassy and Consulate, returned from exile at Bordeaux to Paris. M. Millerand, Minister for War, was reinstalled on the 8th of January in his official rooms, rue St-Dominique, where French War Ministers occupy the house which Napoleon furnished for Madame Mère.

The entrance and ground-floor remain in their original state, although during the War the fine *Empire* furniture was tucked away in corners or hidden under vast maps. The *Cabinet* of the Minister was on the first-floor, but it is apparently not etiquette for a Minister to occupy the rooms of his immediate predecessor, so that in the course of the War the *Cabinet du Ministre* was frequently changed. M. Millerand was established in an apartment facing the top of the marble stairway, the door

of which was immediately beyond the table at which his *huissier* kept guard, and it was a curiously austere and depressing chamber. M. Millerand's dry legal manner interposes a barrier between him and any new acquaintance—a characteristic which makes it difficult at first to appreciate his qualities of head and heart. There is not a Frenchman more honest, more generous, more tender-hearted, straighter, and braver than M. Millerand. But his ironic mannerism, not that of the English barrister, but that of the stiff lawyers of "Bleak House," interposes an obstacle which takes time to break down. A shock of white hair, a thick black moustache, strong glasses concealing the expression of the eyes while accentuating their glitter, a caustic and unrevealing manner of speech—short, grim sentences between long intervals of taciturnity—created an atmosphere by no means pleasant for a newcomer. But when he thawed there was no more attractive personality among a long series of French Ministers than this ex-Socialist turned oligarch. M. Millerand, although he was Joffre's superior, called himself the *Intendant* of the Commander-in-Chief, and set out uncritically and untiringly to support him and to

supply him with everything he required. It was an unselfish vocation, patriotically fulfilled.

M. Millerand gauged with clearness the factors that swayed the European conflict, laying stress on its naval aspects, its military prospects, and diplomatic weakness. Vehemently he emphasized the necessity for closer intimacy, freer discussion, and more frequent personal intercourse between Lord Kitchener and himself. Above all things he pressed for reinforcements, every man that could be spared for the armies of the West. But Lord Kitchener's reluctance to break up his growing armies, his objection to sending half-trained men into the field, were not easily overcome, and the fundamental conception of a prolonged war, which was the basic fact of his military policy, was at variance with the ideas of General Joffre, whose calculations and dicta M. Millerand never questioned. There was, besides, in the English Cabinet a strong element of opinion in favour of widening the field of Allied strategy, which would involve the use of troops otherwise than upon the Western Front. Some fresh line of advance, possibly from Salonica, in order to relieve the enemy pressure upon Serbia, was strongly

advocated by Mr. Lloyd George, and in France by M. Briand—a plan the perils of which Lord Kitchener realized, but did not refuse to face, so that he was unwilling to commit his new armies to the West until the strategy of the War was more clearly determined. Schemes and plans, strategic and political, involving strange uses of naval and military forces, were discussed by the "Aulic Council," as Lord Fisher called the conference of Ministers reinforced by Mr. Balfour, who was not yet a member of the Government. At this council was played, according to Fisher, a game of ninepins : someone propounding a plan, which, when it was knocked over, knocked over someone else's, and so forth until the board was cleared.

It was the impossibility of obtaining a definite agreement upon the strategy of the War in all its theatres, together with the haunting fear of the entrance of a Balkan *bloc* into the conflict on the German side, that influenced Lord Kitchener, and bred reluctance to commit his new armies to the Western Front, or to provide troops in support of the fleet, when an attempt should be made to force the Dardanelles. Lord Kitchener complained

that no distinction was drawn between the military and political consequences of proposed objectives—and it is by no means certain that in wars between free nations any such distinction can be drawn—but in January, 1915, pregnant decisions were taken, sometimes negative, sometimes positive, without due regard to the political advantage to be secured on the one hand by preventing the entrance of Bulgaria into the War, and on the other by cutting Asia free from Germany by the capture of Constantinople. Unfortunately, too, the respective cost in troops and munitions was not carefully weighed; nor was a common agreement obtained between those who favoured the Dardanelles attack and those who wished to go to the relief of the Serbs.

When the secrets of that troubled time are revealed, it may appear that the fire, energy, and enthusiasm of Mr. Churchill carried his political colleagues off their feet against their better judgment. But the finest gamble and unluckiest miscarriage of the War, not excepting Falkenhayn's attack on Verdun, cannot fairly be put down to the sole account of Mr. Churchill. In the Archives of the Defence Committee lay hidden the results of a minute

enquiry into the chances of this hazardous project. Had these important papers been called for and studied by the Cabinet, Sir Maurice Hankey's warning, reiterated over and over again, that to attempt to force the Straits with ships only and without a substantial landing party, was to court disaster, would not have been neglected. Lord K. refused a combined operation, on the ground that he had neither men nor munitions, unless he could be assured that reinforcement to France might be delayed and an expedition to Salonica not required; but he cannot be acquitted of a share in the responsibility for an enterprise that he had the power to veto if he was not prepared to support it with the landing troops that any soldier knew to be essential. He did go so far as to say to Mr. Churchill, "You get through, and then I'll find the men," for he was aware that the attack on the Dardanelles was a critical stroke full of possibilities, and that even a partial success would inevitably lead to results tremendous in their influence upon the course of the War: he fully realized the value of the prize, and that the incalculable profit to be achieved would determine questions of strategy that the

Cabinet was unable to settle on its own account.

As things actually happened, the origin and sanction of this amazing feat of arms, this splendid failure of Gallipoli, and the levity with which the chance was taken, are likely to astonish the future historian.

It was in order to arrive at some agreement between the two countries upon the manner in which the new armies could most advantageously be used that M. Millerand came to London on the 21st of January, 1915. Escorted by Lord Kitchener to Epsom and Aldershot, he was given a glimpse of a "K." Army, and, in spite of the abominations of deep snow and bitter fog, he was impressed by the numbers and carriage of the men. In the discussions that followed it became clear that the attack on Zeebrugge would not take place, for the resistance of Joffre to the project had hardened, and M. Millerand, as was his habit, supported the Generalissimo. Lord Kitchener, with no sense of disappointment, reverted to the plan for an advance from Salonica, and obtained from M. Millerand a promise that the proposal should be studied by the French General Staff. In a room of the French

Embassy, dreary enough to suit his austerities, with nothing provided for his entertainment but an old copy of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, M. Millerand resisted all attempts to lure him to sanction strategical plans which he made pretence of inability to grasp. His military conscience was in Joffre's keeping, and with regard to Salonica he shrewdly asked : "Est-ce que c'est vraiment la pensée de Kitchener?" adding, "Il me semble qu'ici en Angleterre vous regardez de trop près l'opinion publique. Un plan médiocre bien arrêté vaut mieux que de changer souvent de plan. Il ne faut pas encombrer nos généraux de suggestions."*

* * * * *

M. Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador, to whose quiet activities both countries owe so much, shrewd and observant, had no misgivings about the soundness of Joffre's views. Cambon used all his diplomatic skill and influence to induce Mr. Asquith to insist upon Lord Kitchener's renewal of a pledge he was supposed to have given, that every available man should be sent to France. M. Cambon, usually silent and reserved, professing not to speak or

* Journals.

understand English in spite of twenty years' residence in this country, occasionally expressed his views with great freedom. He had a poor opinion of Allied diplomacy in the Balkans, and especially of the "stupidity" of approaching Ferdinand of Bulgaria hat in hand, when he should have been treated with indifference and contempt. M. Cambon gave assurances that the suggestions for a flank attack through Serbia should be carefully studied by Joffre, for Lord K.'s personality impressed Cambon, and he credited him with the *flair* of the savage, though he looked primarily to Mr. Asquith, whose unflinching determination he placed high among the assets of France in this country. During the negotiations preceding the 4th of August, 1914, he had found Mr. Asquith resolute from the first to come to the assistance of France, and he never doubted that, in spite of many vagaries on the part of his colleagues, Mr. Asquith would get his way.

Not altogether unperturbed by the attitude of Lord Kitchener towards Joffre's fears for the Western Front, when M. Millerand returned to Paris he enlisted the sympathy and obtained the support of the British Ambassador. Sir Francis Bertie was the most

popular English representative to occupy Pauline Borghese's palace in the Faubourg St-Honoré since the days when Robert Lytton captured Paris by his intellectual charm.

For ten years Bertie had represented the King in France. His previous career at the Foreign Office, of which he was at one time the social pivot, his familiarity with public affairs, his indifference to conventional propriety, and his personal good looks, lent a flavour of the *ancien régime* to diplomatic gifts that impressed the French. His conversational powers, matured in the far-distant atmosphere of Holland House and Strawberry Hill, appealed to corresponding qualities in our Allies.

A Rabelaisian humour, not always in the finest taste, was enjoyed in the *cabinets* of Republican Ministers, while in the *salons* of the Faubourg and the *couloirs* of the Quai d'Orsay he bore his seventy years with a gallantry that young men admired and old men envied.

Whether addressing M. Delcassé or a deputation of charitable actresses, he could be blunt, frank, or debonair as occasion demanded. He could accept the Legion of Honour from the

President or an *accolade* from Mlle. Bartet with equal sang-froid. Shrewd and adroit, he could be firm and uncompromising. From him the French and British Governments heard the unvarnished truth. His caprices were those of his caste and upbringing. But his prejudices, though onerous to his subordinates, were treated lightly by his equals and superiors. He was in many respects an excellent Ambassador, the representative among British diplomatists of a class long since passed away. In hierarchical authority he ranked with the brothers Cambon, and, to his credit and theirs, earned the distinguished honour of Teutonic fear and dislike.

While these questions of high military policy were under discussion, in which M. Millerand took a shining part, he was harassed by attacks in the Chamber directed against himself, and, what mattered far more to him, against Joffre. In February, 1915, the French politicians hostile to M. Millerand had managed to force the appointment of a Parliamentary Committee, including de Freycinet and Clémenceau, nominally to enquire into the French Army Reserves, but in reality to mount an attack on M. Millerand and General Joffre.

The impassive Minister was undaunted, and scoffed at the cavillers who talked of removing Joffre from the Supreme Council to Paris, where they proposed for him a post supposed to resemble that of a Chief of the General Staff at the English War Office. "On ne change pas de cuisinier le jour de la fête," was M. Millerand's remark, alluding to the imminence of an attack which Joffre believed might presage the defeat of the enemy.*

* * * * *

In January and February, 1915, a wave of audacious optimism swept over the Western Front. On the 16th of February every man in the English and French lines appeared to know of the impending attack on Gallipoli. The ball was fixed to open on the 19th—so rumour ran—first a naval attempt to force the Straits, then a landing, so that the element of surprise was deftly eliminated, if the gossip of the Western Front was reflected in Berlin, as assuredly it was. Hopes ran high and victory awaited the Allied arms at Constantinople.

Meanwhile Canadians had landed at St. Nazaire; another "historic moment" ominous for Germany; the first step taken by the New

* Journals.

World to redress the balance of the Old. The *Victoria*—a Channel boat—had been attacked by a submarine, an innovation in the usages of war which could only recoil on the heads of the Boches. Emotions were stirred and hope distributed over the Allied armies in the West. Only Joffre and Fisher had misgivings, but both were said to be tired and obstinate. There was another whose instinct or reasoned feeling led him to doubt the imminence of success at Gallipoli. Sir William Robertson, the new Chief of the General Staff under Sir John, pungently questioned the wisdom of a naval attack unsupported and lacking the element of surprise.

Sir John, though he had fought hard to secure Henry Wilson, was reconciled to his defeat, and could not withhold from Robertson that respect which his character imposed upon all who came in contact with him. His rough humour, too, appealed to the Irish element in the Commander-in-Chief. It was difficult to resist a man who, when congratulated on his appointment, jerked his thumb in the direction of Sir John's room which he had just quitted and said: "Do you congratulate him?"

By the Ides of March many high hopes had

been dashed. The failure in the East had left the British Head-Quarter Staff at St. Omer unmoved, but at Chantilly there was a momentary depression. The French had to be reminded that in war "il ne faut rien prendre au tragique, et tout au sérieux," and Foch, who faced the relentless truth with his usual high spirit, soon breathed into his compatriots his extraordinary sense of military proportion. Chantilly revived, and once more a monastic silence of sanguine preparation brooded over the little racing town.* General Joffre's Head-Quarters were established in the Hôtel du Grand Condé, so well known to English sportsmen. The entrances to Chantilly were guarded by *postes* about a mile away; access and egress were impossible without military passes by day, and at night without the *mot d'ordre*. A few trainers and jockeys, their womenfolk, and a sprinkling of the inhabitants whose houses had not been commandeered for the use of the Staff, were all that remained of the racing centre. The château of the late Duc d'Aumale had been prepared in August, 1914, for occupation by the Kaiser, and when the advance guard of his Prætorians had taken possession,

* Journals.

M. Maçon, the Keeper of the Palace, removed a few of the priceless manuscripts and pictures for greater security, while he himself remained at his post, and thus had the satisfaction of watching from within the palace the reaction of the Battle of the Marne in the rapid retreat of his unwelcome guests. During the occupation of the town by Joffre's General Head-Quarters, M. Maçon kept the ground-floor library of the château open for officers and men attached to the Staff, and it was much used.

General Joffre soon abandoned his room in the "Grand Condé," leaving the larger building free for his Staff, and was installed in a small house, Villa Poiret, a few hundred yards away.

On the deserted roads of the *zone des armées* during the first three years of the War there was no sight more impressive than the automobile of General Joffre with its gold-fringed tricolour flag, rushing between Chantilly and the Fronts of Champagne and the Vosges.

The Chief of his Staff, General Pellé, a soldier of rare intelligence and personal charm, occupied the first-floor of the "Grand Condé." The foreign military Missions were on the floor below, grouped in a large room, with plenty of

tables, maps, and comfortable chairs. But the delight of the place to British officers was the little Rothschild villa where our own Mission lived. The Forest was an endless resource, both for riding and walking.

It is difficult to describe the complex elements which made of Chantilly under General Joffre a place and an atmosphere unique and totally apart. It was felt that here was congenial soil, on which, amid profound silence, the spirit of victory might fructify and grow.*

At the Grand Quartier there were not many regular or combatant officers. The mass of the work was performed by civilians brought into the Army, men of capacity and brains, carefully selected, who were graded, the best of them, as Captains, but never higher. No active officer of sound physique could be spared from service in the line. There was a British officer of high and manly temper at Chantilly who for four years kept the balance even between the armies of the Allies, supported by a small staff of devoted friends. Such unity as there was in the combined operations of England and France, such rude machinery as

* Journals.

existed, it was his and their business to watch and handle. He was the confidant of both Staffs, the expositor of the tactics of both armies. Technically proficient, broad-minded and well-read, incapable of act or thought which was not straight, it was not surprising that this officer received the confidence of Lord Kitchener, Sir John French, and Sir Douglas Haig, and was successively trusted by Joffre, Nivelle, Pétain, and Foch.*

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If during the early months of 1915 twenty years of life could have been lifted from his shoulders, or if the K. of K. who still flashed at times to the surface could have been guaranteed the aloofness in which his mind worked best, the question as to what effect Lord Kitchener's force and spirit would have produced on the course of the War is of irresistible interest. During those months, which under circumstances more adapted to a full manifestation of his peculiar gifts might have proved to be the grand epoch of his life, his steps began to falter and his influence to wane.

In order to give his resource and energy full scope for their display, time was required, for

* Brigadier-General Sidney Clive, C.B., D.S.O.

he was a thinker whose brain worked slowly, methodically to its conclusions, and at this critical moment he was hurried into action he did not approve, by a system new in his experience, which he was not fashioned to withstand. . During many daylight hours and white nights he pondered over strategical and political problems. Like most great men of action, he knew everything and read nothing.

One afternoon in the early days of January he stood before the great map which hung at the end of his room opposite to the table at which he usually sat. He was dressed in the blue uniform which he still habitually wore. His horn spectacles gave to his heavy brow an even heavier look. He put his finger on Buda-Pesth and said: "Remember what I am saying. After the War, after Germany is beaten and broken up, Hungary will be the danger-point of Europe, and at the same time the new point of departure." Then, turning to his hearer, he asked: "Where are the danger-points for Germany now? You should know—you write about these things."

The listener replied that he only ventured to criticize, that any fool could criticize, but it took a bigger fool than usual to attempt con-

structive criticism. "Then," said Lord K., "I will tell you. Here is one—Salonica; here is another—the Dardanelles; and here is the last—Alexandretta." And then he added, as if speaking to himself: "But it would take time; and no one would have to know."*

All those who were closest to Lord K., Fitzgerald better than any, were well aware that he looked with stern dissatisfaction upon the strategical conception of the War which limited its possibilities to the Western Front. But he was too experienced and too wary not to realize that to attack the enemy in flank required secrecy and careful preparation over a considerable period of time. Left to himself he would have selected, as all his friends knew, some point in the Near East, and would have launched an attack with every man and gun and shell which could have been begged, borrowed, or stolen from the Western Front. He could take great risks, but only when he could take time. Such a risk, after adequate preparation, was the rôle to which in his mind he had destined the new armies. Of this determination no one who knew him doubted.

Allenby's achievements in Palestine reflected

* Journals.

long afterwards Lord Kitchener's conception of a flank attack in an Eastern theatre of war. Given a free rein, his decision once made, there would have been no halting, no stammering, when the moment came. But his hand was forced, and the tragic glories of Gallipoli, followed by the collapse of Russia, left the Allies no battle-ground except the Western Front upon which there was any reasonable chance of decisive victory.

By the light of these speculations the resistance of Lord K. to the pleadings of M. Millerand and General Joffre for reinforcement, his procrastinating methods in meeting Sir John's demands of a similar kind, become intelligible. Knowing the qualities Lord Kitchener had displayed in the past throughout his career, the mind recoils from the deduction of his political colleagues that he was a consummate example of an Eastern idol. What distinguishes the last fifteen months of Lord Kitchener's life from its earlier period is the vague consciousness in his mind that he was no longer the K. of K. of the Atbara—the age of Cromwell at Naseby—but that the twenty years which had since elapsed had bereft him of the vigour which inspired purpose, fixed

determination, and moulded the will of the man who stood on the spot where Gordon fell, and ordered the bones of the Mahdi to be thrown into the Nile.

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"Murder may be done by calumny, as well as by dose and dagger."—Lord Acton.

By the month of March, 1915, public aspirations of an early victory had foundered. The attack on the Dardanelles, which might have shortened or ended the War, had failed. The static conditions in the West had been reproduced in the East, and a state of siege had commenced at Gallipoli. Optimism still prevailed in its consecrated form of newspaper articles and Ministerial speeches, but its tone was lower. "Business as usual"—a heinous phrase which had produced evil results—was not so often heard in public. Had Germany possessed a commander of genius, had Hindenburg, old and inelastic, been of the age of the victor of Arcola, the War might have run a different course. Time and the ocean were fortunately on the side of England. Her Government was honest, but its crucial defect

was want of energy, and although there was no faint-heartedness perceptible, there was a lack of fibre. It was a dark hour.

Sir John had moved from St. Omer to a house at Blendecques, about a mile away, on a high slope across the valley. It was secluded and the grounds stretched upwards to a series of commons covered with heather, across which the sound of the guns boomed continuously.

In the late afternoon of the 9th of March, 1915, the Field-Marshal returned from a six-mile walk just before nightfall. His spirit was moved by thought of the morrow and the sobering reflection that at his signal many fine young soldiers would rush upon death.* In spite of a clouded horizon he was curiously optimistic, and his belief in success which was never realized irritated Ministers who failed to appreciate how great an asset in the leadership of armies is that eternal triumph of hope over failure. Although the French had tried a "break through" at Perthes and Beauséjour and failed, Sir John's confidence of being able to do so at Neuve Chapelle was unshaken. There was a stream of contention over that battle; recriminations

* Journals.

followed between Generals which were re-echoed in clubs and London drawing-rooms by officers on leave fresh from the field. But the trouble lay deeper than the mishandling of troops or the quarrels of subordinate commanders.

The story has been told in great part by Lord French in the last chapter of the volume called "1914." In this chapter he says: "It is my object to make known some of the efforts I made to awaken both the Government and the public from that apathy which meant certain defeat. I exhausted every effort, by urgent official demands to the War Office, and personal appeals to Lord Kitchener and such Cabinet Ministers as I came in contact with. When these efforts got no response, I gave interviews to the Press and authorized public men who visited me to urge this vital necessity in their addresses. Nothing less than my deliberate conclusion, after all these measures had failed and nine months of war had elapsed, that the Empire itself was in jeopardy, forced me to act in May, 1915, as I did. I was conscious before taking this step, which meant the overthrow of the Government, that it also meant the end of my career in France, with all

the hopes and ambitions that only a soldier can understand. But the consciousness of the great results achieved in this upheaval has been my reward, and I trust that a recital of my difficulties may, if occasion arise in the future, protect the British Army in the Field from the recurrence of any similar situation.

"At a conference at Chantilly with Lord Kitchener, I reminded him of my constant representations on the subject of munitions, both officially and privately, and warned him that the danger would be fatal if instant action were not taken to supply our needs.

"Just about this time, the then Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, made his famous Newcastle speech, in which he stated that the Army had all the ammunition it required. When I read this speech, after all my public and private appeals, I lost any hope that I had entertained of receiving help from the Government as then constituted. I therefore determined on taking the most drastic measures to destroy the apathy of a Government which had brought the Empire to the brink of disaster. A friend was standing by my side on the tower,* and to him I poured out my doubts and fears, and

* Watching the fight at Aubers.

announced my determination. He warned me that the politicians would never forgive the action I proposed, and that it meant my certain recall from the command in France. But my decision was made, and I immediately started for my Head-Quarters, fully determined on my future course of action. If any additional proof were required of the hopelessness of any relief coming from the War Office, I found it waiting for me when I reached Head-Quarters that afternoon, in the shape of a telegram from the Secretary of State for War, directing that 20 per cent. of our scanty reserve supply of ammunition was to be shipped to the Dardanelles. I immediately gave instructions that evidence should be furnished to Colonel Repington, military correspondent of *The Times*, who happened to be then at Head-Quarters, that the vital need of high-explosive shells had been a fatal bar to our army success on that day.* I directed that copies of all the correspondence which had taken place between myself and the Government on the question of the supply of ammunition be made at once, and I sent my Secretary, Brinsley Fitzgerald, with Captain Frederick Guest, one of my A.D.C.'s, to

* Colonel Repington's telegram.

England with instructions that these proofs should be laid before Mr. Lloyd George, who had already shown me, by his special interest in this subject, that he grasped the deadly nature of our necessities. I instructed, also, that they should be laid before Mr. Arthur J. Balfour and Mr. Bonar Law, whose sympathetic understanding of my difficulties, when they visited me in France, had led me to expect that they would take the action that this grave exigency demanded.

"For my unprecedented action I claim that no other course lay open to me. To organize the nation's industrial resources upon a stupendous scale was the only way if we were to continue with success the great struggle which lay before us, and I feel that the result achieved fully warranted the steps I took."*

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It was always M. Millerand's contention that the business of a Minister for War, in war, was to be the *Intendant Général* of the Commander-in-Chief in the Field. This doctrine was heresy in Whitehall; the official mind in those exalted precincts did not reckon that for a Minister in London to set a standard of requirements for

* "1914," by Viscount French of Ypres.

an army fighting under such conditions as those prevailing in France and Flanders, was heresy far more perilous and absurd.

The sense of justice which, when passion is not roused, appears to be inherent in great communities, refused to attribute personal blame to Lord K. for a state of things which was a fulfilment of constitutional and Parliamentary practice. The flames of that contention have not yet burnt themselves out, and some pregnant facts have been obscured in the smoke which still hangs about it; but it was known to many that by October, 1914, the French had already converted many of their great factories into munition works; that they had offered to explain and exhibit what had been done at Renault's and elsewhere to any officers whom Lord K. might select, but that the War Office was so confident in its intellectual priestcraft and infallibility that no advantage had been taken of the lessons which could have been learnt from our Allies. At General Head-Quarters it had also been freely asserted that the War Office artillery officers had expressed surprise, not unmixed with condemnation, of the expenditure of ammunition in normal trench fighting; and yet hardly any

War Office official had seen those tracts of land, tortured even in those early days, that stretched away from Ypres to Vimy, or the cramped and tangled flats from Neux-les-Mines to Vermelles;* had they done so, they might have been irresistibly impelled to stimulate the manufacture of weapons and ammunition which alone could avail for attack or defence in such a battlefield as the enemy's tactics imposed. It was all so utterly unlike the unbroken desert over which Lord K. rode to the Atbara, or the clean gradients of the Veldt.

As Sir John has asserted, uncontradicted by any officer who was in France at that time, not only were operations stopped for want of ammunition, but after an attack either upon or by the enemy, the shortage of shells was a real danger to the whole army. Every soldier on the Western Front believed the War Office to be supine in this vital matter, and the feelings of men wrung by anxiety were not soothed when, instead of shells, the War Office sent to G.H.Q. drawings of pontoons for crossing the Rhine.

Sir John's observations, as they have been called, have met with misleading criticism. In the military history of our country many

* Journals.

parallels are to be found between Sir John's action and those of his predecessors, and he does not appear to have broken a convention which was not more frequently broken by Marlborough and Wellington. It may be admitted that there is an impious flavour about the notion of a Commander in the Field openly criticizing his political chief, but working institutions are occasionally subject to these unconventional shocks, and in the long run national good is served by them. Upon Lord Kitchener's mind the effect produced was painful, for he was unaware of the high mental tension on the battle-front in France produced by inferiority to the enemy in nerve-racking projectiles.

There is a note of his extant dated the 14th of May, 1915, which contains the following phrase: "I am deadly sick of this system of intrigue, and if I get an excuse I shall take it and get out of it all."*

He was then living at York House, which had been lent to him by the King, for whose friendship Lord K. was never weary of expressing gratitude. He occupied the rooms on the ground-floor, and his own was immediately on the right hand after passing through the hall,

* Correspondence.

while the faithful Fitzgerald was close at hand in the room beyond. The hall was generally littered with bric-à-brac, tapestries, and furniture, which Lord K. either rejected or bought for his house at Broome; the building and furnishing of that home which he did not live to occupy was his hobby and sole recreation.

The night of the 14th of May was full of disquiet. His note was the repercussion of the events Lord French had described, and especially of Colonel Repington's notorious telegram to *The Times*. Lord K., dressed in mufti, sat alone with Fitzgerald,* huddled in a chair, quiet and very gentle. He had the look of a wounded animal.†

The situation was full of difficulty owing to the characters of the protagonists in the drama; for neither had any primary wish to be disloyal to the other, but in the minds of both lay a misconception.

Sir John did not differentiate between the position of Lord K. and that of any ordinary civilian Secretary of State, although the difference was obvious to the unofficial perceptions of the whole nation. Under normal circum-

* Bt. Lieut.-Colonel Oswald Fitzgerald, C.M.G.

† Journals.

stances there would be nothing unusual in a Commander-in-Chief in the Field corresponding direct with a Prime Minister or any of his colleagues. The Duke of Wellington had often done so, and Lord Wolseley had followed suit with amazing freedom. Under normal circumstances the Secretary of State for War was an ordinary civilian member of the Cabinet, though at the same time the official chief of a Commander in the Field, and there would not necessarily be any military sentiment between the two. The trouble here was that the circumstances were abnormal, and that Sir John thought of Lord K. as a subordinate Minister in Mr. Asquith's Government, whereas Lord K. thought of Sir John as a military officer subordinate to him.

"People do not distinguish, they turn readily to what comes first;" and the Greek historian's difficulty is ours when we come to apportion blame to Lord Kitchener and Sir John French under the trying circumstances which prevailed on the Western Front and in the War Office in those transition months between February and October, 1915.

Of the two men Lord Kitchener was the first to make allowance, and to bring his wounded

feelings into close touch with fact. His good sense, fairness, self-command, and that quality of "bigness" which he possessed in common with many great men of action, kept his annoyance in guard.

On the merits of the dispute he convinced himself, though he failed to convince his colleagues in the Government, that the clamour for shells and munitions was exaggerated and wantonly factious.

Everything humanly possible, within reason, he contended, had been done to provide what was necessary, and the critics, most of them wholly irresponsible, he classified as pessimists, who minimized the efforts as well as the achievement of his conscientious officers. "Pessimism" was throughout the War a convenient word to fling at anyone who ventured to criticize a course of action or a method of procedure settled by the authorities. Yet the soldiers in the army zone, and their friends in the Press who clamoured for more shells, for greater supplies of ammunition, and its quicker delivery, were not pessimists, unless, as Lord Morley once said, it is to be a pessimist to seek a foothold in positive conditions and to insist on facing hard facts.

It shortly became evident that the overstatement of a good case and the merciless blows, sometimes below the belt, which characterize the methods of the Northcliffe Press, had roused general indignation against the detractors of the man who above all Englishmen stood in English eyes as the Paladin of the War. At the same time no detached mind could call in question Lord Northcliffe's choice of the higher expediency. He believed that Lord K. was standing in the way of a freer development of our manufacturing resources for the production of munitions of war; therefore Lord K. had to be bent or broken, because he was, unquestionably—in his loyal way—covering with his high authority the blind complacency of his subordinates at the War Office. This seemed the plain common sense of the matter then, and there is no evidence that it is less so now.

A copy of Lord Northcliffe's principal paper was burnt in the Stock Exchange, clubmen were putting themselves to extreme inconvenience by boycotting *The Times*, and in French official circles there was an impression that England had gone mad, for neither French soldiers nor civilians could comprehend that the official censorship should pass articles in the

newspapers personally attacking and lowering the prestige of the man who was carrying on the War.

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When the dark clouds of those winter months passed over and the spring came, explorers of facts and ideas that govern the destinies of States may hereafter discover in the last fortnight of April and the first fortnight of May, 1915, the signs of those basic causes which brought about Germany's defeat; for on the 22nd of April asphyxiating gas was first used against the Allies in the second Battle of Ypres, on the 7th of May the *Lusitania* was torpedoed at sea, and on the 14th of May events occurred in London which led directly to Mr. Lloyd George's appointment as Minister of Munitions, and ultimately to the formation of the Coalition which carried the War to its successful conclusion.

As the month of May sped on, the town was full of rumours. It was said that Lord Northcliffe was working for Mr. Lloyd George to form a new Government with Mr. Balfour at the Admiralty, or, failing this, to substitute Mr. Lloyd George for Lord Kitchener at the

War Office. What happened was that Lord Fisher resigned his place as First Sea Lord, and Mr. Asquith dropped some of his old colleagues and succeeded in forming the first Coalition Government. It was soon definitely known that Sir Edward Grey and Lord Kitchener retained their offices. The personal attacks upon the War Secretary redoubled in violence, but his self-mastery showed itself in the wariness and prudence with which, when the momentary irritation had died away, he suppressed his injured feelings. He appeared calm and unimpassioned, without a sign of anger or bitterness, and without a trace of what a great Irishman called that wretched and wicked prejudice which admits a difference of opinion as a cause of hatred.* He sent a special envoy† to Sir John French with instructions to explain to the Commander-in-Chief that he himself had no desire for any increase of authority, that he was indifferent to attacks, that he would never explain or reply, that he might be deprived of any powers the Government thought fit, but (recanting his note of the 14th of May) that he meant to continue to administer the War Office and the Army until

* Grattan. † Journals.

he was officially dismissed. He wished Sir John to know that he had been told of these newspaper attacks, which he had not read, and which he was assured had been engineered at General Head-Quarters; but he bore no malice, and had not the slightest intention of visiting upon the Commander-in-Chief the imprudence of his friends. "I am out to fight the Germans," he said, "and not to fight Sir John French." He emphasized his denial that he had ever entertained the idea of taking over the command of armies in the field; he declared that he never would suggest such a course to the Government, and if it were suggested to him, he would meet it with a strong remonstrance. He was anxious that his statements should be impressed upon Sir John; and he wanted it made clear that he had sent out to Flanders every available man and gun. When he last saw Joffre and Sir John, he had said that in the event of their breaking through the German line, he would send out the new army to follow up a retreating enemy, but he made the promise absolutely contingent upon a break through; his reason for this being that until the German lines were broken he felt himself obliged to keep an army in reserve, so that if an impera-

tive necessity arose, he could use it elsewhere. When, however, he was urged strongly to reinforce Sir John, although the German lines had not been broken, he finally consented to send out one Division, and later a second Division, which was absolutely the last that could be supplied with ammunition. Should consignments of small-arm ammunition, expected from America, arrive in time, he might be able to send out a third Division; but the despatch of fresh troops was contingent absolutely upon the supply of rifle and gun ammunition. Sir John complained of the shortage of ammunition for the troops and guns he already possessed; this shortage would only be increased if further reinforcements were sent before the supply of ammunition was adequate for their needs.

He wished Sir John to realize that the task of the Commander-in-Chief in the Field was to endeavour to beat the enemy with the troops that he possessed. It was impossible for Sir John, he contended, or anybody in Flanders, to form an accurate judgment of the resources at the command of this country, or of its needs and necessities in other parts of the world. Just as he would not interfere with the dis-

position of troops in the field under Sir John's command, so he felt bound to express a hope that Sir John would not interfere with his functions as Secretary of State and Head of the Army. Co-operation should not be difficult where the fields of action were so distinct.

He felt sure that Sir John would understand that events occurred in the Near East and upon the Eastern line of battle of which Sir John could not have full knowledge; the conditions changed in the whole theatre of war, and these changes directly influenced and sometimes rendered nugatory promises and expectations in the narrower theatre. Since, for instance, the conversation with Joffre and Sir John, to which he had alluded, when he expressed a hope of being able to send out a portion of his new army, the Russians had been defeated so overwhelmingly that the latest information available suggested that a very slight German reinforcement would convert their defeat into a crushing disaster. How was it possible that, in the face of the retreat of the Russian armies and the consequent possibility of a huge transfer of German troops to some other point in the widely extended battle-line, some hesitation

should not be felt in committing the last reserve which, for the moment, this country possessed?

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When this message was delivered to Sir John,* he was at Hazebrouck, his advanced Head-Quarters. They were in the centre of the *Place*, but there was a long garden in rear of the house with a sort of ditch running through it, currently believed to be the main drain of the town. Sir John liked these quarters, although the guns were too audible, and their varying intensity fidgeted him; there was also the contingency of a hasty move under shell-fire, always an embarrassment to a Head-Quarter Staff. When in a moment of depression, and irritated by the venom of his critics in the Press and in the Cabinet, Lord Kitchener made use of the word "intrigue," he was unaware of its misapplication to the proceedings of the Commander-in-Chief himself. Sir John's action had been and was in the nature of open warfare; he was, as he has since explained, convinced of the vital necessity of what he had done and was doing, and although he admitted that he had been annoyed and hurt by Lord K.'s letters and telegrams, especially by

* Journals.

messages brought him by his own Generals whom Lord K. had seen, he declared that he was actuated solely by the peril of his troops due to their inferiority to the enemy in munitions of war. If there had been intrigue, he was free from it, whatever may have been the tortuosities of others.* There was no doubt that Sir John, high-strung and sensitive, was sore and angry at Lord K.'s telegrams and letters, written hastily and unsympathetically expressed; while Lord K., irritable and overworked, had spoken injudiciously to Generals, who had repeated his blunt criticisms to the Commander-in-Chief.

Easily swayed by personal prejudices, Sir John's violent dislikes rarely placed fatal obstacles in the way of a saner judgment. When not goaded or exasperated, he grew calm, and time after time he would return from an interview with Lord K. with admiration for his old chief re-established. On the other hand, he was ever ready to scan the written word with a perverse desire to find cause of offence; and this common weakness was seized upon by General Robertson when called into counsel, as the basis of a constructive suggestion he made

* Journals.

to lighten the burdens of the situation upon the two chiefs. The effect of General Robertson's good sense and the moderating influence of his massive character was immediate. With insight and judgment he attributed the disquiet to what he called the vicious plan of direct communication between Lord Kitchener and Sir John French; it was contrary to the strict terms of the War Office constitution, and the real source of these recurring troubles. He advised going back to the sound system that all telegrams and letters from the Secretary of State for War to the Commander-in-Chief in the Field should pass through the impersonal medium of the General Staff. If that were done there would be an opportunity of correcting hasty expressions, and of removing possible misunderstandings by bringing other minds to bear upon the drafting of communications which should always be couched in well-considered language. This suggestion seemed to promise a solvent for these troubles. General Robertson realized the importance to Sir John himself of a friendly Secretary of State for War. There was no better security for a Commander in the Field, for when difficulties arose, or failure, or part failure, occurred, a

friendly Secretary of State was the surest bulwark against hasty or unreasonable criticism. Lord K.'s support might at any moment become of supreme importance to the Commander-in-Chief.

General Robertson's personality was one of England's first assets in the War. Although aversion to any display of emotionalism had bred in him a certain hardness of manner, there was no kinder heart or wiser brain in the Army. If he was not always considerate, he was always just; and although sometimes too guarded and negative, when his advice was proffered the man was lucky who took it.

On this occasion Sir John at once agreed to what his C.G.S. proposed.* He wished Lord K. to know that he commenced this war with a feeling amounting to no less than personal affection for his old chief, whom he considered the greatest soldier he had ever met, and added: "I quite allow that the tension through which I have gone, and trying times, may have warped my perceptions, but I shall do my utmost to remember that I served with Lord Kitchener in South Africa, and enjoyed his trust and confidence in a degree which I can never forget."†

* Journal. † *Ibid.*

When Lord K. understood General Robertson's suggested change of procedure, he at once agreed that all letters and telegrams between himself and Sir John French should be seen and despatched by the Chiefs of the respective General Staffs, thus eliminating the personal element from correspondence which, as it was in reality official, could not be made private by writing that word on the top of the paper.

Sir John possessed the glory of placability, so that for a while Lord K.'s figure ceased to be as a bar of red, flaming across clouds; while on his part Lord K., putting aside private feelings, turned aside from these personal matters to the greater business in hand. The Shell Controversy may have some historical value, although insistence upon its dolorous monotony is apt to destroy interest in any attempt to tell the story of Lord Kitchener. It was undoubtedly a contest between the older and newer conceptions of carrying on a great war. It throws light upon the archaic methods of the State when faced with such a crisis as that of 1914, and the want of flexibility and adaptiveness in its public servants. It illuminates both the strength and the weakness of Lord Kitchener, his disregard of self, his high bear-

LORD K., 1916

From a sketch by Jean Baptiste Guth, by kind permission of "The Graphic."

facing p. 150

ing in the face of obloquy, his charity to his critics, and his loyalty to his subordinates. But it also displays him as unreceptive to new ideas, as disinclined to adopt new methods which he himself did not originate—slow to take advantage of the experience of lesser men.

Finally, by becoming the watchword of a faction, this dispute became the historic ensign for the legitimate ambition of a man who was destined to lead the people of England with such fire and vigour that their fleets and armies were able ultimately to achieve what in May, 1915, seemed beyond achievement.

IV

1

"Observation is the hard path, speculation the easy one."—Anon.

Lord Kitchener had been subjected to a prodigious attack. Sharp differences had arisen between him and others, soldiers and civilians, not less patriotic or less determined upon victory over the enemy than he, who had appealed to passion as well as to reason. In the agitation that followed he had been severely handled, and his administration of the War had received some measure of condemnation by the setting up of the Ministry of Munitions with Mr. Lloyd George at its head.

But the confidence of the people did not fluctuate, and the masses remained unshaken, misjudging neither the man nor his achievement, so that when the King bestowed the Garter upon him, the Sovereign reflected the feelings of the people and endorsed their convictions.

Soon after the first Battle of Ypres it became

clear that if close relations between the British and French General Head-Quarters were to be maintained, so as to secure the maximum of Allied efficiency, a supreme authority to weave together the threads of strategy would have to be found. During the greater part of 1915 lack of authority, leading to declension of that uniformity which is the essence of good Staff work, was observable in the operations on the Western Front. Want of cohesion was more serious in the management of the War as a whole. In the last week of March Lord K. was at Chantilly with General Joffre; M. Millerand and Sir John were there. From that meeting M. Millerand returned to Paris convinced that "la suprématie de Joffre est indispensable," and that upon that essential point "votre gouvernement devrait avoir le courage d'insister."*

Between the Allied Governments upon the question of supreme command there was no plain dealing. The French persistently believed that Sir John had been instructed to take orders from Joffre; and the Generalissimo himself believed it. The truth was that, at the outset of war, Sir John, with characteristic chivalry,

* Journals.

had offered to serve under Joffre; but his instructions from the Government were clear, and left him no option. There was another and cumulative impediment to unity of command; the Expeditionary Force had swollen into a great army, and what would have been easy enough in August, 1914, was by no means easy in March, 1915, for the feelings of officers and men had to be taken into account. M. Millerand admitted that it would not be a simple thing to *rédiger* the necessary document for placing Sir John under General Joffre's orders, but he continued to insist that although there could be no question of Joffre issuing tactical commands to British troops, every strategical movement should be imposed by Joffre upon the Field-Marshal; otherwise "on ne peut pas assurer la victoire."*

Lord K. and M. Millerand were unfortunately endowed with reserve on wrong occasions, and a little more passion, even though it might have perturbed their two Governments, would have solved a difficulty and countered a danger.

M. Millerand declared that the plan of attack on the Dardanelles had not been disclosed to

* Journals and Correspondence.

the French Government, and General Joffre complained that he knew nothing beforehand of the advance at Neuve Chapelle. If these statements were not to be taken too literally, M. Millerand could, and did, argue that, as he had placed General d'Amade under the orders of Sir Ian Hamilton at Gallipoli, Lord K. should place Sir John under the orders of General Joffre—otherwise it would be far better to put Joffre under the orders of the Field-Marshal; dual control of strategy was contrary to every sound military maxim.*

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Early in the month of June differences of opinion arose which led some weeks later to the first attempt to grapple with this difficult subject. The theatre of war had been widened, and it was necessary to find some better guide than a polite understanding between so many scattered authorities. M. Millerand sent to London his *Chef de Cabinet*, a distinguished and talented French officer, but of stiff bearing and didactic speech. Manners counted much with Lord K., and this officer jarred upon him; so, adopting one of his favourite poses when antagonized, he appeared to be lacking in com-

* Journals.

prehension and unable to grasp the simplest proposition. Ostensibly the motive of the visit was to discuss the impending French offensive, and this in reality it was, although Lord K. pretended to think that the object of the French Mission was what he called a "fishing enquiry" into his intentions and resources. His attitude so baffled the French that they returned to Paris with an impression of Lord Kitchener's mediocrity that no rallying of his subordinate by M. Millerand could shake, and which was only modified when Lord K. was found dominating the Calais Conference when the military chiefs of both nations met some months afterwards.

After many discussions between the General Staffs, after consultation with their subordinate Commanders, in which Sir Douglas Haig showed remarkable prescience of the shape the War would take and grasp of its governing conditions, the two Commanders-in-Chief agreed upon their offensives for the late summer and autumn of 1915.

An unexpected difficulty then arose. All had not gone well with the recent French operations, and although a meeting at Calais between Mr. Lloyd George and M. Albert

Thomas, the French Minister of Munitions, was considered satisfactory, General Joffre's reserves were thin, and directly and indirectly he had pressed for reinforcements, casting a covetous eye on Lord K.'s new armies.

On the 29th of June Lord K. produced a Memorandum which he had prepared, showing that he differed, for purely military reasons, from the two Commanders-in-Chief on the wisdom and chances of an autumn offensive. He was unimpressed by the arguments used, and his plea for standing still until the following spring was based upon the unreadiness of the new armies, and the importance of building up large supplies of guns and ammunition. He contended above all that it would be throwing away the chances of success if a combined attack on the Western Front could not be co-ordinated with a Russian advance, which was impossible until the "munitioning" of the Russian armies was in a more favourable state. When by Lord Kitchener's desire the gist of this Memorandum was reported to the French Grand Quartier Général, Joffre vehemently differed.* He and his officers admitted the force of Lord K.'s reasoning, but they were intractable, and ex-

* Journals.

plained with fire and vigour the cogent motives for the delivery of another blow before the winter set in. Considerations of *moral* could not be eliminated, and the fierce temper of the French armies expected another effort to be made to drive the invader out of France; and, further, the French people might misunderstand if the effort were not made. Joffre had added 21 Divisions to his army by reducing the strength of companies of battalions from 250 to 200, and by taking men from the depots. His main attack was preparing in the Arras sector, and his plan assumed that the British would co-operate on the left of his attacking force, so there was much perturbation over the reluctance of Lord K. to approve of his scheme. There were political reasons also which were not put forward, but were of common knowledge in France, that made a successful offensive indispensable to the security of the French Ministry. There had been bitter attacks in the Committee of the Senate upon the conduct of the War, upon General Joffre and M. Millerand, which were not without weight in the decision of the Grand Quartier Général to stick out for the offensive planned by the Staff. From what was said at Chantilly it was

clear that the conviction of its necessity was unfaltering.*

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In spite of the constitution of a Ministry of Munitions with the shining figure of Mr. Lloyd George at its head—an appointment which had given fuel to the Shell Controversy—and in spite of carping criticism, public and private, of Lord Kitchener's methods and capacity, the rule of political reaction, which works as surely and inevitably as any natural law, appeared to render more assured than ever his position as Minister for War. At the Calais Conference—the first gathering of Allied representatives, military and civilian, to discuss war strategy—Lord K.'s was the most picturesque, the most representative figure, notwithstanding the presence of Mr. Asquith, Mr. Balfour, and Lord Crewe (acting for Sir Edward Grey), M. Millerand, Messieurs Augagneur, Delcassé, and Viviani, as well as the two Commanders-in-Chief—Joffre and Sir John French.

The English Ministers arrived at midnight on the 5th of July in a Scout. The arrangements were ill made. They stumbled ashore in the darkness; there was no one to meet them; they

* Journals.

found their way with difficulty to the hotel. Even the right number of beds had not been prepared—some subordinate had blundered.*

The following morning the French Ministers and General Joffre came by special train to Calais, and after certain preliminary conversations the Conference assembled. The memorable sequel was the unexpected effect produced by Lord K. upon its members. His colleagues were astonished; told each other that they had never heard him to such advantage; and commented upon his "unevenness" in council. The French were much impressed. It was for Lord K. a meteoric moment. He seemed to be freshened up by contact with the French, whose language, of all the English present, he alone spoke tersely and well. He was calm and deliberate without inconsistency in the propositions he brought forward. He put the best construction upon everything that was said, and while stating in convincing argument the military objections to a premature offensive and the reason for urging a halt until the spring, he appeared to appreciate more clearly than any of his colleagues, and to state more clearly than the French themselves, the political motives indissolubly bound up with the psychology

* Journals.

of the French armies and people, which outweighed the purely military argument for delay. On that occasion he proved himself in discussion resourceful, bold, and candid. The French were aware of his wide popularity and power, but they had heard him depreciated. He was personally unknown to them all except M. Millerand, and for the first time French statesmen and soldiers were given a taste of his quality as a man of action; patient in discussion, forceful and intrepid of speech. It was an immense surprise.

It was finally agreed at the Conference that the combined attack should take place in accordance with Joffre's desire. Early that morning Lord Kitchener and General Joffre had had a long interview in the saloon of the special train which had brought the Ministers to Calais, and although the precise nature of that conversation was never revealed by Lord Kitchener, the surmise is not far from the truth that the elements in the political situation which were not and could not be frankly disclosed at the Conference were used with remarkable diplomatic skill by Lord Kitchener, and ultimately secured unanimous agreement.*

The Calais Conference was immediately

* Journals.

followed by another at Chantilly between Sir John and Joffre, where the details of the plan which had been settled in principle were worked out in an atmosphere of singular serenity.

For many years to come speculation will hover round the events of the year 1915, and writers of books will try to shed light upon the results of decisions which, had they gone differently, might have altered the course of history. It would certainly seem that during the latter half of the year the fate of Europe hung in the balance.

If fortune had favoured Ian Hamilton at Suvla Bay, the War might have ended at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. If Hindenburg had succeeded Falkenhayn in May, 1915, the German Empire might not have perished.

Looking at Lord Kitchener as an actor on the great stage of the War, the Calais Conference in July, 1915, was his supreme hour. Some faculty within him, which had survived his translation from East to West, had vindicated his claim to the confidence of his countrymen. He had stood square against the thunder-blast of a powerful Press, and he had for a time recaptured the lost faith of his most eminent colleagues.

2

"Though one of the most shrewd men in England, he was perhaps the most unintelligible speaker that ever perplexed an audience."—Sir W. Scott *on Cromwell.*

The autumn months of 1915 were dispiriting. Troubles accumulated. Following on the failure to secure the prize which the attack on Gallipoli had offered, came Loos. In the Balkans the outlook was gloomy. Our diplomacy was as luckless as our operations. But those who were best qualified to read the difficult script of popular sentiment, and the officers engaged in recruiting, knew that, if the War was to be fought to a long finish, England was approaching the end of her resources under a voluntary system. The national uprising, inspired and exalted by Lord Kitchener's personality, had produced masses of men in advance of the possibility of clothing, equipping, and arming them. Conscription during the first months of the War, experts agreed, would not have yielded more men than Lord K. actually obtained for the new armies. He had no means of clothing and equipping more than he got. The objection

to the voluntary system of recruiting was not its failure to produce men, but its pernicious influence and disorganizing effect on the nation at large, by taking all the finest, physically and morally, from the mass of youth available in the first bunch, and indiscriminately plucking out from important industries their captains—the very men who under a rational and fairer system would have been ordered to remain at their posts. These objections and dangers lay at the root of the voluntary system. They were well known to statesmen and thoughtful observers of modern war. But unfortunately for England, political faction had treated these matters as part of its stock-in-trade, and, with the exception of Lord Roberts, no one in the first ranks of politics or the Army had in past years ventured to advocate compulsory enlistment. Lord K.'s success up to the autumn of 1915 smoothed the path of the politicians, and there had been no need to face this thorny question. But now the necessity had arisen; for it was plain that the War would be prolonged for at least one, if not two or three years, and that methods could no longer be relied upon which had proved so successful hitherto for meeting its wastage. It was about

this time that a phrase, "equality of sacrifice," made a mark. Everyone knew that, however sharp the pressure of circumstances, popular imagination required some other appeal, if the demand for conscription was to ripen into practical achievement. But the expiring struggle of the voluntary system of recruitment took far longer than was then thought possible. Although there is as yet no sort of proof, some were convinced then, and still believe, that the reluctance of Lord K. to become the protagonist of a change, his waywardness—if this word may be truthfully used of him—in the matter of conscription, was the potent and final cause of the decline of his prestige in the Cabinet. Some of his colleagues were bitterly opposed to the principle of compulsion, others were ready to accept what they felt to be inevitable. They united in expecting and desiring a lead from Lord K., but he appeared vague and unsettled. That he could have turned the scale both in the Cabinet and in the country during those autumn months was beyond question. For a variety of reasons, none of which he ever expounded, and at which we can only guess, he refused to ask his colleagues for fresh Parliamentary powers.

Yet he knew, for every soldier knew, that he would be unable to put and keep in the field, during the following year, the troops he had promised M. Millerand and General Joffre to provide.

Those who were intimate with him found him displeased and doubtful. Whether his mood reflected annoyance at the possibility of having to abandon those personal appeals which had most naturally been a great source of satisfaction to him, or whether he honestly felt that as a soldier he was unequal to a task which was essentially political, controversial, and beyond his experience and capacity, must remain uncertain. What is certain is that the differences of opinion in the Cabinet could only have been reconciled by Lord K.'s acceptance of the principle of compulsion, and that he held back. Lord Curzon had never concealed his views. He had advocated compulsory service from the day that the first Coalition Government was formed, and Mr. Lloyd George was currently believed to have said that if Lord K. would only say the word, not a voice would be raised in the country against it.

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During these months the fortunes of war

seemed to sway to and fro. Had the decision which was taken afterwards been taken then, victory might have been achieved at least a year sooner. No one who reads the confessions of Hindenburg and of Ludendorff can come to any different conclusion. During the debates on this question Lord K.'s colleagues thought him irresolute and unsteady. For there was no doubt that he had made up his mind that compulsory service was necessary, and Fitzgerald* never concealed the fact. In Eastern surroundings, in Egypt or in India, his decision would have led to instant and vigorous action. But the miasma of Downing Street acted upon him like a spell. He procrastinated; counted heads and weighed authorities; he attempted to deliberate and refused to act. Those who were attached to him, Fitzgerald in particular, who were convinced that without compulsory service the War could not be won, tried to deceive themselves and others by exaggerating the opposition which an attempt to carry a Bill would arouse. They echoed an argument they had heard used by a man of supreme political experience, that ever since the days of Queen Elizabeth, whenever England had engaged in

* His Military Secretary.

Continental struggle, she had supplied ships, money, and armies to her Allies, in that order. Any reversal of this long-established usage, he said, could only be defended if the country was united on conscription; the necessity for unity was the principle which had guided the Government during those painful hours in August, 1914, and to that guiding principle the Government must stick.

It was an ingenious argument, but no one was taken in. Lord K. fortified his reluctance to take action by this convenient and plausible reasoning, and stubbornly refused to become the arbiter of the situation. His colleagues—except Mr. Asquith, who had least reason to do so—never forgave him, for during these months the rift in the Government widened perceptibly.

It was clear by the end of September, 1915, that the stock of admiration not unmixed with fear which had animated his colleagues for Lord Kitchener in the early days of the War was spent. The weeks went by slowly and painfully. It would be senseless to condemn him because the root of evil was the circumstance of his surroundings, which were strange and paralyzing. He was unused to acting in con-

cert with others. His life had been lived in isolation, and the responsibilities he had borne in Egypt, in the Sudan, in South Africa, were individual, not collective. Even when Commander-in-Chief in India, he had made no attempt to square his opinions and actions with those even of his superiors, and a consequence of his unassimilating personality was the fall of one of the most powerful of Indian statesmen from the Viceregal Throne. When suddenly this soldier of autocratic temperament and Eastern traditions found himself seated at a table with twenty colleagues, who led him to believe that it was his duty to conduct the greatest of all wars by common agreement with them, he shrank into obstinacy and silence. These meetings have been described by one who was occasionally present : " All the talking was done by the people least competent to discuss the subject. The Lord Chancellor delivered an exceptionally long harangue on strategy. The Secretary of State for War said nothing."*

But he was not always silent. At times he was driven into an unconsidered flow of talk more exasperating to his colleagues than his

* Sir W. Robertson.

reserve. His form of speech was Cromwellian in its obscurity and incoherence. He would seem to be thinking aloud, his mind tossing in a flood of difficulties. The dialecticians and lawyers who sat around him could make nothing of it or him. The men who tried to argue with him at the long table in Walpole's old house in Downing Street gazed at him in despair. They never saw him, as others did, pacing his room at the War Office, before the great map which hung upon the wall, revolving the perils of the present, and attempting to pierce the clouds which hung over the future.

If the conduct of the War had been placed in his hands, if he had had from the first the help of a trained General Staff Officer of anything like the calibre of Sir Douglas Haig, he might have rivalled his own successes in the Sudan and South Africa; he would have measured and compared the dangers in East and West; and he might have altered the course of the War, and ended it in 1916.

This opinion, it may be said, is speculative, but it is based on the momentum of his character and past achievements. He had no chance at a Council Board of twenty-three—described by some ribald onlooker as a vestry

meeting with the Vicar in the chair—he was caught in a net of convention, and from it he never was able to break away.

These controversies have no interest now, except in so far as they throw light upon the character of Lord K.

In the second week of August, 1915, he visited, at General Joffre's invitation, the southern portion of the French line. He saw nearly every senior General in the French armies, and a large number of troops. He visited the Front west of Soissons, went on to Verdun, and overlooked the German trenches at St. Mihiel. General Joffre accompanied him, and he and his hosts were well pleased with each other.*

When he returned to England on the 19th of August he had come to realize more clearly than before the necessity for making a new departure in recruiting. He was distressed to see that his own armies, his offspring, suffered for lack of drafts, but still he could not be induced to take the initiative. He gave no sign or lead. For the moment it looked as if Mr. Lloyd George, who had become the protagonist of compulsory service, might retire

* Journals.

from the Government. Amid the discontent of an influential section of the Cabinet, and to the dismay of the Army, a fresh compromise was agreed to, and it was settled that another twist should be given to the voluntary screw. No man in the country was more convinced of the necessity for compulsory service than Lord Derby. He was, however, warmly attached to Lord K., and he was ready always to subordinate his personal opinions to the practical needs of the country at the moment; so Lord Derby embarked on the "Derby Scheme." It was the last gasp of the voluntary system.

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Lord Kitchener was in a turbulent mood. He had much to trouble him. After the Battle of Loos had gone amiss, junior officers, drifting home on leave, diffused criticism and comment over the receptive minds of their womenfolk, and Minister after Minister brought tales of inefficiency and blunders to the Secretary of State for War.

The readiness of Ministers to listen to irresponsible stories of failure in battle, tactical mistakes, and illusory losses, of none of which the reciters could have knowledge, from young officers of no weight or significance, was a

constant source of trouble throughout the War. Lord Kitchener was harassed by questions from his colleagues based on chatter at luncheon-parties, and when, adding to his trials, the "Dardanelles Committee" began ordering movements of troops in the East without previous reference to the War Minister, the system of annoyance reached its culminating-point.

Those who had known him in India were astonished at his patient self-control, although he never concealed that he was hurt and angry. It was difficult to determine whether his placability was due to a sense of duty, or to atrophy of that tense fibre so characteristic of the K. of K. of former days.

At General Head-Quarters sensibilities were stung to fury by the gossip of London drawing-rooms, and anger was not allayed when the losses at Loos were supplemented by threatened withdrawals of troops from the Western Front for the expedition to Salonica, upon which the French Government had finally determined. Was there no one, it was bitterly asked, in England firm enough to tell the French that not a man nor a shell could be spared for this belated adventure? These sentiments were

shared by General Joffre and his Staff at Chantilly, so that the French Government were well aware that if the Salonica expedition depended on the assent and goodwill of the leaders of the British and French armies in the field, not a man would go.

When, on the 8th of October, Lord Kitchener arrived at Chantilly to discuss the formation of this new Armée de l'Orient, and explained the views which were common to British Head-Quarters in France and the War Office in England, he was asked: "Why not send five Divisions from Gallipoli to Salonica?" Thus was anticipated, by way of conjecture and query, an event which no Englishman at that date would have contemplated as a remote possibility. Lord Kitchener listened to the politicians from Paris and their electrifying plans of what was intended at Salonica. In order to translate them into terms of war, 400,000 men would be required, was his comment. General Galliéni a few weeks later plumped for the same figure without having knowledge of Lord Kitchener's estimate. The soldiers who were at Chantilly remained silent; but they recognized, in the faces of the politicians, signs of a new battle-storm upon a

far-distant front against which military remonstrance was bound to prove futile.

M. Briand adhered to the plan which he had favoured since Christmas, 1914, and so dangerous was the political situation in Paris, so menacing the growing opposition to the Government—due, it was said, to their "shuffling" over Salonica—that a decision to hurry forward the expedition appeared necessary for the safety of M. Viviani and his colleagues.

General Joffre had consistently disliked the plan, which denuded him of reserves and munitions, as much as any soldier at British Head-Quarters or in the War Office, but he was sensitive to the internal difficulties of his Government, and interpreted more easily than any Englishman could the vague rumours associated with the name of General Sarrail.

Lord Kitchener was powerless to give a final answer, still less to yield to the political expediency of this proposed military diversion, without the authority of the English Cabinet. When M. Millerand returned to Paris, the French Government was tottering to its end, and M. Viviani's last act, in the hope of placating the ruling assembly, was to send General

Joffre to England with instructions to force a decision upon this burning question of Salonica, and to end the shilly-shally of the British Cabinet. At a meeting in London with the Ministers, Joffre, finding a good deal of stolid resistance, suddenly, to the amazement of his hosts, broke into impassioned speech, and ended by saying that if there was any more delay in fixing the contingent for Salonica, he would resign his command. But just as the ill-fated expedition to Salonica was too late to save Serbia, so Joffre's mission to London was too late to save M. Millerand and the French Government.

Joffre returned home to find M. Viviani replaced as First Minister by M. Briand, and General Galliéni the new Minister for War.

V

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"De l'unité d'action dépend le succès des moyens."—Napoléon.

In the summer and autumn months of 1915 the aspect of London and of Northern France was different from that later picture which has been burnt into the memory of so many men and women.

In London, the meaning of the War, its sadness, its unequal sacrifice, its toll of youth, its irremediable losses, had not been brought home to the masses of the people. Amid an orgy of vulgar advertisement, in which Lord Kitchener's name was flaunted, "business as usual" was carried on. Restaurants and theatres were packed with people; money had not lost its purchasing power, and there seemed to be more of it distributed among all classes than ever before. Although the streets were fairly full of men in khaki, the "straw-hat brigade," as the ambushed middle-class youths

were called, was in great prominence. Lord Kitchener did not live to see the effect upon the London streets of the Battle of the Somme.

In France and Flanders, though there had been much destruction, the gruesome devastation now associated with the Western battle-line was yet to come. From the heights of Bouvigny, or the white twin towers of St. Eloi, the prospect was different from what most of those still alive remember.

A shell-hole was in those days a comparatively small affair, and poppies and cornflowers sprang quickly up about its edges. Ablain-St.-Nazaire and Souchez were still recognizable as villages; there was shapeliness still about the Cloth Hall at Ypres; while the red coal-shafts of Lens were not as most men remember them—a mass of twisted wreckage in blue tarns of shell-splashed waters. Even the nights to a watcher from Mount Kemmel were different then, and comparatively peaceful, for, although the flares competed with the stars, the nightingales could still be heard in spite of the guns. Hell had begun to be visible, but was not yet let loose.*

* Journals.

On the centenary of the Battle of Waterloo, two friends were pacing a garden in Arques, attached to an old house where their grandfathers had lodged with the Duke of Wellington a century before on the way from Brussels to Paris; the theme of their talk being that, however diligent a man of business Lord K. might be, it was of momentous importance to the army in the field that the War Office should be speedily equipped with an Adjutant-General like Macready, and a Chief of the General Staff with recent war experience. General Macready, then Adjutant-General in France, was known to be a wise soldier-administrator, with a dramatic grasp of big situations to which his name entitled him.* General Macready was, as it happened, already designated for transfer to Whitehall, a change from which great benefits accrued to the armies in France, for he knew their needs and did his utmost to fulfil them. It was unfortunately not till many months later that Lord Kitchener was provided with a Chief of the Staff of recent war experience, when he obtained the services in that

* It was believed to have been for him—as it certainly was for one of his father's sons—that Browning had written the "Pied Piper of Hamelin."

capacity of Sir William Robertson, one of the greatest soldiers of the War.

If England was unsteady, in the sense that there was at that time no universal comprehension of the desperate struggle in which the country was engaged, there was a still more curious optimism at St. Omer. Not even the heavy fighting which commenced in the last week of September, and which by the 5th of October had not yielded the results expected, had damped the enthusiasm of the High Command. There is this to be said for the Battle of Loos—that, if it raised certain big tactical questions, such as the right principles which should govern the handling of reserves, it proved the superiority of the newly enlisted and trained British soldier over his German foe. It was perhaps this sense of the mastery of the unknown warrior over the German that accounted for the optimism at General Head-Quarters. Two of the new army Divisions, the 9th and the 15th, both Scottish, had pleased Sir Douglas Haig by the spirit and daring of their attack. He had been struck by the steadiness of these young troops, especially of the 15th Division, who were subjected to the severe test which only hardened veterans are expected

to stand, of having to continue their advance while letting a retiring Division pass through their ranks. They were the first-fruits of Lord Kitchener's achievement, and his pride in them was great.

Although his first conception of the army, as he desired to make it, was 30 Divisions, there were at this time, in October, 1915, 37 Divisions in France, 10 in the Dardanelles, and still 12 Divisions of Territorials and of the new army at home, although these troops in England were not yet trained and equipped. Instead of 30 Divisions, Lord Kitchener now spoke of 70 as the minimum number which the spread of the War and its strain upon England in the East might require the English people to furnish.

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When M. Briand, on the 28th of October, 1915, became President of the Council, and Galliéni Minister for War, Bulgaria had been at war with Serbia for a fortnight. Sir Ian Hamilton, whom Lord Kitchener had always trusted and liked, was recalled from Gallipoli, and General Monro named as his successor. Among many absurd rumours—*potins* of which the French are fond—was a story that Lord K.

had once fought for Bulgaria; hence his want of alacrity in despatching troops to help the Serbs. For M. Briand's premiership was a symbol, a public declaration that a new military policy was about to be tried, and that an expedition on a large scale to Salonica had been decided upon. Few seemed to notice the dangerous deduction from these political squabbles—that military strategy was at the mercy of chance majorities in the Chamber, and of the predominance of this or that politician.

The appointment of General Galliéni as Minister for War created no surprise. For months his name had been mentioned as the probable successor of Millerand. He was older than Joffre, and had been the superior of the Generalissimo in Madagascar. Had he been a man cast in ignoble mould, there might have been friction between these two soldiers, whose positions time and chance had reversed; but, as Governor of Paris, Galliéni had largely contributed to the Battle of the Marne, some said had planned it, and his help and support to Joffre were unstinted till the day of his death. Since the retreat of the German armies in September, 1914, he had confined himself to his

duties as Governor of Paris and devoted himself principally to reorganizing the defences of the capital on a wider perimeter.

Finding his official rooms in the Invalides inconveniently cramped, he had in the first days of the War moved across the road into a comfortable building ordinarily used as a school; and, surrounded by a particularly brilliant Staff of which General Clergerie was the head, he watched over the safety and tranquillity of the city committed to his charge.

Of spare figure, austere habits, and grave demeanour, perhaps a great Staff Officer rather than a great Commander, his personality and military opinion carried weight second to none in France. Round his room, on tables specially made for the purpose, lay the large-scale maps of the Western Front, and by an ingenious arrangement of his own invention, every movement of the armies was recorded for him hourly by his vigilant Staff.

On the 27th of October, 1915, the night before he became Minister for War, Galliéni was discussing that "unité de direction" in the conduct of the War without which he had little hope of its successful issue. "If we fail," he said, "to co-ordinate our activities by means

of machinery that can regulate from day to day the common action of the Allies, we shall fail to win the War." It was of first-rate importance that the Allies should immediately and jointly consider the steps that should be taken to guard against the difficulties and dangers obvious to everyone when complete junction had been established between Germany and Turkey. "In the East," he said, "the defensive is never the most prudent form of military action." Galliéni's broad deduction was the vital necessity of recasting the Allied methods of carrying on the War, without attaching unworthy importance to questions of *amour-propre* or traditional usage, for the circumstances were exceptional and the dangers imminent. "L'unité d'action est la chose essentielle," he said, and then walked to where hung a fine lithographic chart of the Battle of the Ourcq, and lifting it with his left hand and glaring through his pince-nez, he placed his right forefinger in the centre of the great map of the main theatre of war. "Here," he continued, "sits the German Emperor with his Chief of the Staff and his Director of Railways—only these three, no one else. You observe these lines of railway running parallel

from our frontier on the West to Warsaw in the East, and you observe also these lines of communication to the South and Near East. All these strategic means of transport are manipulated from this central point by one, or at the outside three, directing brains. How to counter this formidable threat and jam this highly efficient machine is the most urgent problem to-day."* As far back as the month of May, 1915, Lord Kitchener had been made aware of the strong views held on this question by the ablest French soldiers. Its bearings on the worldwide theatre of war had been argued with all the fiery energy of our Allies, as the military paradox grew more desperate. The arguments used were trite, culled from the letters of Napoleon to the Directory, and from the whole literature of strategy; "Either Kellerman or I, but not both in conjunction"—a dictum which had seemed to point with too much emphasis to M. Millerand's dilemma between Joffre and Sir John—had been broadened into a wider discussion of the control of the War in every theatre. Lord K. had been reminded of the events of 1757, of the triumphal course of those campaigns and

* Memoranda and Journals.

their management; and no one knew better that, for the purpose of directing the strategy of the present war, the system of Cabinet government was far more unsuitable than when the elder Pitt usurped its functions.

About the middle of October, General Gouraud's Chief of the Staff,* who had been invalided home after a grave wound and attached temporarily to Galliéni, summed up the views of those who looked to the creation of a directorate as a vital element of success in a Memorandum which met with the cordial approval of Lord Kitchener, who had long been anxious to find a formula that would provide chances of agreement between the two Governments, and a plan for their co-operation in military strategy.

Almost the first wish expressed by Galliéni after his arrival in the rue St.-Dominique was for a meeting with Lord Kitchener to discuss this vital matter. Like Lord K., he believed firmly in the ultimate victory of the Allies, but he was no optimist as that term was defined by Lord Morley, in the sense that he went about

* Colonel Girodon, afterwards a General, and killed leading his Brigade into action, to the profound grief of the French armies.

saying it was a fine day when it was raining cats and dogs. He sent word to Lord K. that he regretted that the Serbian question had not been handled in the month of February instead of the month of October, that he shared Lord K.'s concern for the Middle East and for India, for, like Lord K., he was acquainted with the Orient, and never ignored its problems and dangers. In reply Lord K. wrote: "I quite agree with him that co-ordination of our mutual efforts is most desirable. Recent events show the danger of outside rough handling of delicate machinery. I should like to get into touch with Galliéni, but think it should come from him; at any rate, it would be better that way than for me to make advances after Joffre's *sortie imprévue**—alluding to General Joffre's minatory observations at his recent conference with the English Cabinet in London.

Galliéni, although he spoke English with hesitation, read it easily, and Lord K.'s fine handwriting placed no impediments in his way. He immediately drafted a letter asking Lord Kitchener to arrange a convenient meeting, but before the invitation reached him Lord K. was already in Paris. On the morning of the 5th

* Correspondence.

of November, 1915, he unexpectedly arrived at the British Embassy. He was on his way to the Near East.

* * * * *

The reasons hitherto given for Lord Kitchener's visit to the Dardanelles are perplexing and inaccurate. During the week immediately preceding his departure from England, the position of Mr. Asquith's Ministry was insecure, and there came rumours of a secret canvas of the House of Commons, taken by two Privy Councillors, which had revealed so large a measure of support for Mr. Asquith and against Mr. Lloyd George, that the Prime Minister's position appeared to be more assured. But party wire-pullers reported the existence of a powerful group determined on the removal of Lord Kitchener from the War Office, where his mental inertness, according to their view, was jeopardizing the cause of the Allies. This much is known, that at the Cabinet of the 4th of November, when the Salonica expedition was under discussion and proposals had been made to transfer thither Divisions from Gallipoli, someone suggested that Lord K. should go to the Near East and report. This

proposal was received with such acclamation that, although Lord K. was under no illusion about its motive, he assented. Within a few hours he was on his way. Immediately there were rumours that the seals of the War Office were in the King's hands. In point of fact they were in Lord K.'s pocket. The "Tapers" reported that he had been "sent for" by the King, who was still laid up after his unfortunate accident in France; the truth being that Lord K. had walked over, as his custom was, from York House, to inform the King of his departure and ask his leave to go. The support and friendship of King George was throughout Lord Kitchener's last months of life a great solace to him, for he was bitterly conscious of his unpopularity with his colleagues in the Government. Many were the occasions when, overworked and depressed, he strolled across late in the evening to ask an audience of the King, never refused, from which he returned comforted. One of his cheeriest laughs was occasioned by hearing after a long drive alone with the Sovereign to Winchester for some inspection, the King had said that Lord K. talked so volubly there and back, that he himself was unable to get in a word edgeways.

On the 5th of November Lord Kitchener saw Galliéni for the first time, and found him as reluctant as he was himself to face the problem of evacuating Gallipoli and transferring Divisions to Salonica. Both men were full of anxiety for the effect upon the Mahomedan peoples of such a blow to the prestige of the Allies. "I cannot see light," Lord Kitchener said; "it is so impossible to forecast the effect in Egypt and India." General Galliéni was in complete agreement with these fears, adding that he was convinced that the expedition to Salonica was too late and would prove to be useless. "Your Government seems to have no plans, only aspirations," Lord K. had observed, and Galliéni did not take exception to the remark.*

Lord Kitchener expressed a strong wish that during his absence the liaison between the General Staffs should be consolidated, and that the several schemes for the joint conduct of the War by the Allies should be studied. Unless the General Staffs could be got into close touch, he believed that meetings between the political heads of the two Governments would only lead to confusion.

* Journals.

It was arranged that he should leave Paris the following evening, his companions being Fitzgerald and General Horne, whom he did not know well, but whom he had selected as an expert for the purpose he specially required, "liking," he said, "what he had seen and heard of him."

Colonel Girodon was in Paris. His lung wound was still troubling him, but he could have said what his chief, General Gouraud, had written with his left hand, when badly shattered in Gallipoli—"les restes sont bons." Girodon's refined and charming personality, his good looks, his alertness and modesty, his military attainments, and his temperate but decisive speech, were certain to please Lord K., who had heard of him but had never seen him. A hurried request for his services was made privately to Galliéni, as Girodon's knowledge of Gallipoli was first-hand, and throughout the voyage he would be able to supply information to Lord K. otherwise unobtainable. Galliéni, though taken aback, as he had other views for him, promised to give a definite reply next day. Meanwhile Paris was searched for Girodon. He arrived late at the Embassy, and at once plunged into detailed discussion with Lord K.

on the possible effect of German leadership and German guns in Cape Helles and Suvla. Girodon was astonished when at the end Lord Kitchener asked him to accompany him next day to Gallipoli. He could only reply that he was in the hands of his superiors. Lord K. merely laughed and said: "I shall see you at the station to-morrow evening," and he did.*

On the following day, the 6th of November, 1915, Lord Kitchener lunched with Galliéni, who gave permission for Colonel Girodon to accompany him to the Dardanelles as a member of his Staff. He had sent Fitzgerald round the Paris defences, as he was keen to learn about the mechanical devices which Galliéni had established for detecting the approach of air-raiders and for repelling their attacks. Many of them were the invention of young French Artillery and Engineer officers, and were unknown in England in those early days of air-fighting.

In the evening the English official bags arrived by special messenger. Lord K. was much moved by two letters full of regret and expressions of fidelity—one from Sir John

* Journals.

Cowans and the other from Creedy,* his private secretary. In the dingy room he occupied at the top of the British Embassy he stood with his back to the fire while the letters were read aloud to him by Fitzgerald. He was standing with bowed head as he listened, and when he raised it his eyes were full of tears. When he broke the silence he spoke of the dislike felt for him by his colleagues, adding, "Asquith is my only friend." One present told him that an eminent member of the Cabinet had complained that he was wanting in candour and too fond of what were supposed to be "Oriental methods." He said quite humbly: "Yes, I suppose it is so; but I am an old man, and I cannot change my habits—it is too late."†

It was a curious, a momentary, a haunting glimpse of the real K.—massive, inarticulate, shy, and emotional. He seemed, with all his great achievements for a background, a noble creature, of good wholesome colour, in spite of the few darker threads that traversed the tapestry of his character. It was strange that his colleagues should have failed to realize his worthiness and high endeavour, notwithstand-

* Sir Herbert Creedy, K.C.B.

† Journals.

ing his Cromwellian gush of incoherent speech—for his horizon was wide and his motives pure. He was well aware that the mass of his countrymen, all the world over, believed in his disinterested patriotism and strong-handed grasp of the War's essential meaning, and that they, with the King at their head, trusted in his leadership. The common people were not concerned with the Fabian processes, the mediocre reasoning, the stolid approach to obvious conclusions, which irritated his colleagues. These unhappy qualities destroyed the admiration, the affection, almost the respect, which the statesmen and politicians who were his closest colleagues and the companions of his task, once had felt for him. His consciousness of the fact, his inability to convince them of his sincerity, the mortifying contrast between the place he occupied in public esteem and what he knew to be the inner mind of those earnest men whom he vainly tried to influence and guide, these composed the Tragedy of Lord Kitchener, the Nemesis of his past triumphs.

That night he left Paris for Gallipoli, and among those who were present to bid him farewell, there were not many who believed in

the likelihood of his return. Surmise had been free with his fate for the past two days, and the impression was strong in London and Paris that the Ministers who were thought to be glad to see him go would contrive that his vacant chair should be speedily and permanently filled.

"Qui va à la chasse, perd sa place," was the comment of the British Ambassador, and it certainly was the impression of those who professed to know the secrets of Downing Street.

2

"On ne voit presque rien de juste ou d'injuste, qui ne change de qualité en changeant de climat."—PASCAL.

The newly established War Council, of which the Prime Minister, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Lloyd George formed the nucleus, had begun to act, and it had been agreed that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the First Sea Lord were to attend its meetings.

The Cabinet of twenty-three, which had for fifteen months eaten out Lord Kitchener's heart, perished unregretted. Nominally the twenty-three were still "the Cabinet," but

they sank henceforth into obscurity. Mr. Asquith himself had taken charge of the War Office, and within three days of Lord Kitchener's departure he was in possession of the French proposals for a Joint War Council, with a Joint Secretariat attached to it, which Galliéni firmly held to be its imperative attribute. Galliéni had asked innumerable questions about the working of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and a Memorandum, giving an account of the origin and duties of its Secretariat under Maurice Hankey, had been prepared for him. A young and talented French officer who was attached to M. Millerand, and since his chief's fall from power had been appointed to do liaison work with Lord Kitchener, was ordered to carry over to London the plan formulated by Galliéni.*

The principle insisted upon by the French Minister for War, and approved by M. Briand, was that the driving power behind the Unité de Direction—the best substitute that could be found for Unity of Command—should be the Joint General Staffs, provided with an international Secretariat. Joffre, who was consulted, and who had discussed the project with

* Capitaine Robert Doumayrou.

Sir Henry Wilson, was not unfavourably inclined, but he clearly indicated his opinion that Sir John French and he himself should always be members of the War Council. No one believed in the probability of Lord Kitchener's return from the East. General Joffre, in common with the whole of the French military and political hierarchy, was convinced that Lord Kitchener's journey meant his final disappearance from office, and his relegation to some high command in Egypt or in India. Sir John, who was unwell and confined to his room,* also believed that Lord K.'s departure from Whitehall was final; but he himself was beset with rumours emanating from London, that the Government had decided upon his recall, and upon the appointment of a new Commander-in-Chief. At Blendecques and St. Omer this rumour was persistent and currently believed; but when, on the 18th of November, the English Ministers—Mr. Asquith, Mr. Balfour, and Sir Edward Grey—arrived in Paris to meet the French in conference, they were said to have denied all knowledge of the

* The attacks of throat trouble, to which Sir John had been long subject, had undoubtedly grown worse and more frequent. (Journals.)

rumour or its source. Yet when four days later, on the 22nd of November, General Gallićni sent over to Mr. Asquith a figured plan, cleverly drawn by the French General Staff Officers attached to his Bureau, showing his elucidation of the problem of joint military control, and when Mr. Asquith sent back a message to Gallićni that he could rely upon the approval of the British Government, the messenger who bore the reply was entrusted with the task of carrying to Sir John an intimation that in the opinion of the Government he was no longer physically fit to bear the strain of the coming year or years.*

It was said of Marlborough that he was never betrayed into a single rash action, scarcely into a single rash word or expression. It was difficult to hope for such self-command from the impassioned nature of the Field-Marshal, yet under this great trial, this cruel reminder of the hand of time and the passage of years, his modest, warm-hearted soldierly qualities nerved him to stand the shock with a humility that touched and surprised his closest friends.

On the evening of the following day he left for England to consult Mr. Walter Long,

* Journals.

showing a wise and sound choice of a confidant, and to see the Prime Minister.

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On the 29th of November, 1915, Lord Kitchener unexpectedly returned to Paris from Gallipoli. Every effort had been made, every ingenious temptation offered from the pinnacles of Whitehall, to induce him to take over responsibilities which would detain him in other spheres. They were unavailing, and a deaf ear was turned even to the subtle whisper of the "Viceroyalty of the Middle East"—a curious scheme elaborated in a well-argued Memorandum by Mark Sykes, which Fitzgerald firmly believed to have been warmly welcomed by the Cabinet, in the forlorn hope that to be Viceroy of the Middle East would lure Lord K. from the vicinity of Downing Street.* But these hopes were dashed by the news that, after visiting Athens and Rome, he was on his way to England. Since King John had word that the "Devil was unchained," no wanderer had returned home so unwelcome.

Lord K. knew nothing of the events at G.H.Q., and he made no comment when he was informed of what had happened. He

* Correspondence.

spent the morning with M. Briand and Galliéni. He had to tell them that, after consulting with General Monro, and after seeing Helles, Anzac, and Suvla for himself, he had reluctantly concluded that he must advise a withdrawal from Gallipoli. He had formed similar views in regard to Salonica, which he had also visited. Later in the day, when Girodon brought General Gouraud to see him, he went over the whole position minutely, explaining his reasons in detail, and quoting General Horne's views of the hopelessness of attempting to hold Helles and Suvla should the German artillery be brought to bear upon these positions. He then heard that, while Galliéni agreed with all his conclusions, M. Briand, strongly supported by the President, although they accepted the idea of retiring from Gallipoli, took a very different view about Salonica. They were determined to hazard its retention.*

That evening Lord Kitchener left for London to resume his post at the War Office. When Mr. Churchill—the escaped scapegoat, as he called himself—who was doing duty in the trenches with the Grenadier Guards, heard

* Journals.

of the proposed evacuation of Gallipoli, he was tempted to return at once to the House of Commons, in order to denounce a policy which in his opinion was mad and pusillanimous He had no longer a shade of responsibility for the acts of the Government. He had never been a member of the War Council. "I was one of H.M.'s servants," he said, "not one of his upper servants," but he thought himself called upon to leave the front line, where he was enjoying himself so gallantly, for a replunge into Parliamentary strife.

There were as yet no indications of a settled policy between the Allies, and so confused were the issues, and so far off an agreement, that when, five days later, on the 4th of December, Lord K. was back in France, and with him the Prime Minister and Mr. Balfour, it occasioned no surprise. Once more the English Ministers crossed to Calais in a storm of wind and rain. Their conference at the Maritime Hotel with M. Briand and Joffre was held amid the howling of the gale—a fitting accompaniment, the soldiers said, to the farce of Salonica.

Lord Kitchener was asked by M. Briand whether there was truth in the report that the Commander-in-Chief was about to be recalled,

and whether Sir Douglas Haig or General Robertson would succeed to the command; and the reply he received was that the point was not yet determined—but that Sir John's "resignation" was a *fait accompli.*

No sooner had Lord Kitchener and his colleagues returned to London than they were informed of the long-expected attack by the Bulgarians upon Sarrail's force, and that it had been delivered with a degree of success that alarmed the French Chamber. The effect of this blow was to endanger the Ministry of M. Briand. He was blamed, as M. Viviani and M. Millerand had been blamed, for lack of energy and for weakness in dealing with the British, who had, so the French deputies believed, purposely left Sarrail in the lurch. In order to counter the peril, and if possible strengthen the French Government, Sir Edward Grey, accompanied by Lord Kitchener, returned hastily to France, and General Robertson drove from G.H.Q. to meet them in Paris.

At the Hôtel Crillon, in the midst of harassing discussions with the French, Sir William Robertson, who had been offered the post of Chief of the Imperial General Staff at

the War Office, and who had decided to accept the offer of the Government if certain conditions which he formulated, defining his powers and responsibilities, were accepted by Lord Kitchener, opened the subject to the Secretary of State. General Robertson wished to have it clearly understood that the responsibility for operations on all fronts should be placed on the Chief of the Imperial General Staff; that the reports from the armies in the field should be sent direct to him and not to the Army Council; that orders to the armies in the field should go under his signature; and that he should be the sole adviser of the War Council on operations. There were valid arguments for these drastic changes. A vast deal of unnecessary printing would be saved, circulation and publicity of matters which in war it was important to conceal would be avoided, but Lord K. could not concede without a pang this further encroachment on his powers. He felt that they were being gradually filched from him; first munitions, then recruiting, now operations. "They want to use my name and deprive me of authority," he said.

The clash of these two rugged characters reminded onlookers of what might have been

seen any day in England between 1645 and 1660: Lord K. sitting alone, stern and unyielding, at his table in the tawdry French *salon*, with nothing before him but a blank sheet of paper; and General Robertson, another typical Ironside, lying in his shirt-sleeves on the bed in his room, a pipe between his lips, contending for a principle which he believed to be vital if the armies of the heathen were to be smitten before Israel.*

The main principle was not conceded by Lord Kitchener until document after document had been redrafted and amended. Throughout these discussions Lord K. never doubted that Sir William Robertson was actuated by impersonal motives, and was attempting to define the position of a Chief of the General Staff as he knew well it ought to be. When he had approved the final draft of the agreement, Lord Kitchener said: "I hope Robertson understands that, much as I dislike the plan, now that I have agreed, I mean to carry it out."†

Six months later, when referring to the "great loss" the country had sustained, Sir William Robertson made generous amends. "You know," he wrote, "I always thought

* Journals. † *Ibid.*

him a most valuable asset. Latterly I have found him a most helpful and kind friend. I am more than sad to lose him. I feel remorseful because of my brutal 'bargain.' It was never necessary, and was made only because I was misinformed of the man's nature. He was a fine character, lovable and straight—really.''*

This was a dignified salaam to Lord K.'s shade from a man himself as lovable and straight as the "Oriental" to whom it was addressed.

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When, on the 11th of December, Lord Kitchener, having settled the future relations between himself and Sir William Robertson, returned to England, a change of much moment had simultaneously taken place in the control of French operations. General Gallićni had issued a decree under which responsibility for all fronts had been centred in Joffre and his General Staff at Chantilly. The effect of the new decree was to relieve General Graziani, Chief of the Staff at the French War Office, a modest, efficient soldier little known to the British, of the duties he had hitherto unobtrusively performed; while Galliéni, adhering to

* Correspondence.

M. Millerand's formula, defined his own powers as those of organization and provision. But French custom, and the personality of General Joffre, left General Pellé, the head of his Staff at Chantilly, in a position wholly different from that which General Robertson occupied at G.H.Q., or was about to hold at Whitehall. Frank expressions of opinion by subordinate officers to the Generalissimo were of rare occurrence, and the services of at least one General of exceptional ability had been dispensed with because of his failure to realize that General Joffre, unlike Napoleon, did not encourage his officers to talk openly before him.

The services of the brave and talented Girodon, offered by Galliéni to Joffre, had been declined. It was perhaps felt that the frank and gay habits of Gouraud's Head-Quarters were unsuited to the solemnity of the Generalissimo's mess at the Villa Poiret, where no one ventured to break the silence, or to speak unless addressed by the "Chef."

General Joffre's plans for an offensive movement in the spring of 1916 had been shown to Lord Kitchener, and had been laid in broad terms before the British Cabinet, where they had met with fierce resistance. The case for

postponement was deftly argued, but Lord Kitchener held firmly to the opinion he had expressed on explaining the proposals—that neither the Allies nor the Dominions would agree to an attitude of military passiveness until the late summer or autumn. At this time he entertained a belief, which later on he modified, that the enemy would ask for peace terms from the Allies in the following month of August,* provided a strong attack was delivered in the spring; and although the Allies would certainly propose terms which would primarily be unacceptable to the Germans, the enemy would be forced to accept them before the winter of 1916.

On the 18th of December, 1915, Sir John French bade farewell to the Army he had been so proud to lead, and with some of whose most splendid achievements his name is linked. Sir Douglas Haig was appointed Commander-in-Chief. Sir William Robertson had proceeded to London, and was installed at the War Office as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. To the chargin of those who had looked for his support against Lord K., he was found firmly at one with the Secretary of State and the French

* Lord Kitchener was not far out in his guess.

upon the vital importance of carrying on the War by methods of vigorous attack. Unity of thought between Lord Kitchener and Sir William Robertson was unexpected and unwelcome.

To inaugurate the New Year, mischief-makers had circulated a rumour in official circles that M. Briand, during a recent visit to London, had told a journalist of some note that the principal object of his visit was "de nous débarrasser de M. Asquith, Lord Kitchener et Sir Edward Grey." A great hubbub followed, and M. Briand was further reported to have justified his "démarche" by adding that "sans cela la guerre ne fera jamais de progrès en faveur des Alliés." The rumour was authoritatively denied, and M. Briand's shrewdness and tact were a guarantee of its falsity, but its effect was not conducive to the smooth working of the Government at Whitehall, and of the Entente. The storm blew over, but it left a certain amount of wreckage behind.

The wish in certain quarters to be rid of Lord K. had not diminished, but the hope and expectation that Sir William Robertson would bell the cat were unrealized. Robertson fathomed the object of the politicians who had

pressed for his appointment, and who had tried flattery in vain upon his honest mind. But he was not happy about the position of Lord K. "With all his faults," he wrote on the 4th of February, 1916, "we owe more to him than to anyone. Where would we be to-day but for the new armies? He was not well served. If they want to be rid of him, why not move him? I imagine they dare not. Apparently I have been a disappointment in not knocking him down. But it is no part of a C.I.G.S.'s duty to intrigue against his S. of S. At any rate, I won't. He has been all that could be desired so far as I am concerned."*

This tribute to Lord K.'s character was volunteered at a moment when the submerged attacks upon him were fiercest—attacks which, thanks to the loyalty of the masses of his countrymen, proved to be futile and unavailing. "I imagine they dare not," explained the failure of his opponents and critics to drive him into exile. The French Ministers were aware of the intrigue, but they were as firmly convinced in France as in England that Kitchener stood immovable for war *à outrance*, and for the ultimate triumph of the Allied cause. "In

* Correspondence.

this war, and in all great national struggles, *il faut avoir des points fixes*," was the remark of a Frenchman of great influence and sagacity; and he added that the two *points fixes* in France and England were Joffre and Kitchener.

Among his own countrymen Lord K. could count upon the confidence of his Sovereign, and the steadfast backing of all the people who were outside the orbit of Whitehall and beyond the purlieus of the Strand. The King, to whom Lord Kitchener always looked up with feelings of affectionate loyalty, by bestowing the Garter upon him, showed that the Sovereign believed him to be pure-minded, disinterested, big in heart and character, dissociated from personal considerations, and with military instincts not inferior to any of his compeers; a belief which was shared by men and women throughout the Empire, West and East, who had for years anointed him in their hearts to be a captain over them. As a *point fixe* he remained unshaken, until the Fates destroyed him.

Meantime, amid a tumult of discussion over the proposed spring offensive, upon which differences of opinion seemed irreconcilable, and amid the strong conspiracy to change the English Government, the German Crown

Prince, under Falkenhayn's direction, attacked Verdun. By the end of February the situation had completely changed, for the anxiety in France grew acute, and at Verdun the defensive was on a scale which precluded for the moment thought of counter-attack elsewhere. Another serious factor was the health of General Galliéni. On the 3rd of March, 1916, he wrote to a friend: "Je commence à être très fatigué, et vais probablement être forcé de me mettre entre les mains des médecins qui promettent de me remettre d'aplomb."* Unfortunately this promise was never fulfilled, but the intimate liaison between the two War Offices received a check which took some time to re-establish.

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Towards the end of February, 1916, Lord K. returned from a visit to Sir Douglas Haig. That evening he spoke with satisfaction of what he had seen at G.H.Q.—the orderliness, the quiet capacity, and the settled determination which he said characterized the Commander and his Staff Officers. It was evident that he had been pleased and astonished, and his confidence in the result of the campaign of 1916

* Correspondence:

waxed greater. But it was noticed that Lord K. himself for the first time showed in his face the ravages which war was making upon his physical strength. He was aware that the French were seriously alarmed at the fury of the attack on Verdun; but neither he nor General Robertson nor Sir Douglas Haig shared their fears, in view of the natural strength of the fortress for purposes of defence, and the excellent secondary positions on and beyond the Meuse. That evening, in the dim firelight, Lord K. spoke of himself and of his youth. He said that all his life he had been as one that travelleth, and between 1874 and 1914 he had never once spent a winter in England. When he left Woolwich, a boy in years—it was in the spring of 1871—he went over to some friends in France and immediately enlisted in the French Army. He was with Chanzy, the hero of the Loire. But in the meantime he had been posted to the Royal Engineers. After the armistice and during the peace negotiations he returned to England, when he was sent for by the Duke of Cambridge, then Commander-in-Chief. "He called me," Lord K. said, "every name he could lay his tongue to; said I was a deserter, and that I

had disgraced the British Army. I never said a word; and then at the end, the Duke, with a funny sort of twinkle, added, 'Well, anyhow, boy, go away, and don't do it again.'"*

Then Lord K. began to speak of the future of the country after the War. He anticipated no great social trouble, though he believed there would be days of darkness and that England would be poor. "With King George and the Prince of Wales the Monarchy will be stronger than ever," he said.† The views he expressed were broad and sane, and it angered him to think that people should be flustered by gloomy

* Journals.

† He had just been told, by one who was there, that the Prince of Wales, one day at the end of September, when attached to the Guards Division, had met with another narrow escape. He had just left his motor to accompany his General, Lord Cavan, on foot, when a shell exploded on the bonnet of the motor, killing the chauffeur. When Sir John heard of it, he ordered the Prince away from the Guards Division to join the H.Q. of the 11th Corps. Two days later, when driving along a muddy lane, Sir John met the Prince of Wales walking dejectedly alone. He stopped and spoke to him; and the Prince, with emotion, begged to be allowed to stay with his Guards, adding that otherwise he would never be able to look them in the face again. Sir John, moved himself, yielded, and ordered him back to the Guards Division.

anticipations of the upshot of the War, or fears of social disturbance. As for himself, he knew what would be good for him in this life, and declared that he would return to Egypt on the day that peace was signed. When confronted by a reminder of the troubles of 1816 that for many years afterwards beset the country, it was obvious that he had never heard of them; but he tossed the subject aside with the remark that events never recurred, and that the same thing never happened a second time.

VI

1

"Consistency is a puerile temptation."—Lord Acton.

By the end of the first week in March, 1916, General Joffre had recovered confidence in the ability of Pétain to resist the German attack at Verdun. Joffre had offered more troops to Pétain, who replied that he had all he required. It was a good sign. Recent changes in the command and in the control of the War had tightened the nerves of the Allies, but the long-standing trouble about reinforcements and drafts for the British armies in the field was unrelieved.

The depletion of the French reserves consequent upon the Verdun Battle made it more than ever necessary to draw into the British fighting force every man who could be spared from essential services at home. The Derby Scheme had failed to yield sufficient drafts to supply the normal wastage of the armies overseas, and its failure had succeeded in satisfying

everyone except the most bigoted pacifists of the necessity for compulsion if the War was to be carried through.

If Sir Douglas Haig, in order to relieve the pressure on Verdun, were to be forced to yield to the urgent pleas of the French, and were to anticipate the date of the offensive he was preparing on the Somme, he was aware that he would find his armies at least 100,000 men short of their establishment before the attack began.

The position taken up by Lord Kitchener, supported by Sir William Robertson, was that every available man was now required for the army overseas, but that it was not the business of the War Office to fix actual numbers required, or suggest the method by which the men should be obtained. They had convinced themselves that the political conditions of the struggle over compulsion were such that it would be the height of imprudence to give the opponents of that solution of the recruiting problem, which was the only possible solution left, the advantage they would derive from a cry of "militarism" which would be raised immediately if the protagonists of the proposal were found to be soldiers. It was, they contended, the business of the civilian members of

the Government to provide men and to decide the principle under which every available man could be provided, assuming that the Government meant to fight the War through to a victorious finish.

So that when, time after time, Sir William Robertson was asked to state the numbers he required, his answer invariably was, "Every available man"; and from that formula neither he nor Lord Kitchener departed. Lord Kitchener went further, for he informed the French that he would be unable to furnish the reinforcements he had promised, unless he could obtain from the Cabinet a decision in favour of compulsory service. A Cabinet Committee had ascertained by a futile enquiry, to which no importance was attached, that there were 550,000 men who could still be taken for the Army without affecting vital industries, and he was asked if that number would suffice. He refused to reply in any terms other than those agreed upon between himself and Sir William Robertson.

By April Sir Douglas Haig, aware of the imminence of the Somme Battle, declared that if, in order to effect a diversion for the purpose of disengaging the French at Verdun, he found

it necessary to employ 400,000 men, he must calculate upon losing 50 per cent. during the first two months; and he concurred with Sir William Robertson that it would be folly to give the Government any figure when the shortage already existing in his effectives was computed and added to his possible and almost certain losses.* Since the opening of the attack on Verdun, Sir Douglas had taken over the line of the 10th French Army, so for this further reason his reserves were weaker than when he assumed command. By the middle of April the crisis in the Cabinet became acute, and it was generally known that its Unionist members were rallying to Mr. Lloyd George, who had now become the leader of the party of "compulsion." The hopes of the Head-Quarter Staff began to revive.

On the 19th of April there were rumours of resignations, and Lord Kitchener declared that, in the event of an irreconcilable divergence of view in the Cabinet, he would follow Mr. Lloyd George into retirement.† Mr. Asquith's position was full of difficulty, so sharp was the conflict between the two parties in his Govern-

* Journals.

† Journals and Correspondence.

ment. There was a story current that he had said to his colleagues at a moment of supreme indecision: "Please remember that in an hour's time I have to tell the House of Commons what the Cabinet has decided." There was silence, and then Mr. Balfour said: "You had better tell them that the Cabinet has decided it is quite incapable of conducting the business of the country and of carrying on the War." No observation having been made on this, the Prime Minister asked: "Am I to say that to the House of Commons?" Upon which Mr. Balfour retorted: "Well, if you do, you will at any rate be telling them the truth."

When, after long and anxious delay, the news reached Paris in the first days of May that the Government intended to ask Parliament for compulsory powers to take the men required for the Army, a wave of optimistic enthusiasm swept over France. The English Parliamentary debates were watched with interest. M. Briand was confident that the effect in Germany would be far-reaching, that it would accentuate the uneasiness already felt among the Central Powers as to the ultimate issue of the War, and that the adoption of

compulsory service in England would have a lowering influence upon German mentality and *moral*. The effect in France would be even greater, for, in spite of all that England had done, which the French Government gratefully recognized, there were many people in France in whose minds doubts still lingered as to the determination of the British people to go through to the bitter end. To these people the adoption by Parliament of a procedure so foreign to the traditions and habits of the English people would be a *coup de massue*. The whole French nation would recognize that England meant to make every necessary sacrifice, and the doubts that existed would be dispelled.*

M. Briand had always been conscious that his own method of dealing with railway strikes, some years before, had increased the difficulties of the English Government in obtaining the assent of the working classes to compulsory service, by engendering suspicion that military compulsion might be used as a weapon in industrial disputes. In his view England and France would never have so good an opportunity again of coming to an agreement with

* Journals.

the industrial classes upon the question of the rights of Labour to interfere with national services as at the present time; and his opinion was that the Labour leaders in both countries, under the pressure of the German menace which still existed, could be induced to discuss the distinction between industrial combination against Capital employed in the ordinary manner of profit, and strikes that affect directly the efficiency of the State. Although the question was a difficult one, and although it might be impossible in peace-time to solve it, he was confident that, if it was handled then with skill and determination, the workmen might be induced to admit the principle and accept the distinction. It would be a great misfortune if the opportunity were to be missed. M. Briand was appreciative of Mr. Asquith's skill in the management of both his Cabinet and of Parliament; for democracies could not be driven, even in war, but he thought that Mr. Lloyd George had "la vue plus longue." He admired Lord Kitchener's physical and moral strength, but he had once said to him: "You have always lived in countries where at your word a village disappears, or rises from the sands of the desert; and you

cannot perform these miracles on the Boulevard des Italiens.''*

* * * * *

M. Briand's regard for Mr. Lloyd George dated from January, 1915, when they had agreed on the necessity of sending a force through Salonica to help the Serbs. About the direction of the War they had always been in agreement. Mr. Lloyd George once observed to M. Briand that, both of them being Celts, they were perhaps overcharged with imagination. However that may have been, physically there were amusing points of resemblance between them, though M. Briand's beautiful voice was as *hors concours* as Caruso's on the operatic stage. But Mr. Lloyd George's Celtic affinities gave him no satisfactory explanation of the craze of M. Briand and his Government to undertake so late in the day operations on a large scale at Salonica. Keen as Mr. Lloyd George had been for a flank attack in January, 1915, he was not so sure that it would be feasible in May, 1916. The English Cabinet was at a loss to understand the position taken up by the French Government, and they suspected that the reasons were to be found, as

* Journals.

indeed they were, in the conflicting political groups of the Chamber, each of which had his favourite General in tow.

Joffre had made up his mind that the attack on the Somme should commence not later than the 1st of July, and as, by a recent Allied agreement, the Generalissimo's decisions were now binding upon Sir Douglas Haig without reference to the Allied Governments, it seemed certain that the attack would take place on the date fixed.

The French Government pressed for a simultaneous attack at Salonica, M. Briand continuing to urge that, even if the attack should fail, "in order to wage successful war, sacrifices were inevitable."*

The President, M. Poincaré, was even stronger. The hand of Rumania had to be forced; it was folly to leave an army idle at Salonica; and remember, he said, "dans la guerre l'inertie est une honte." As for an "offensive" on the Western Front, it was a word that could be interpreted in different ways, and it required to be clearly defined. An offensive with a view to pierce the German front, and perhaps to drive back the German

* Journals.

line, was one sort of operation; an offensive directed to relieve and "dégager nos troupes" was another.* The President's view was shared by Gouraud and Pétain, both of them soldiers beyond suspicion of any motive other than victory. Both pressed for a simultaneous offensive. Galliéni, on the other hand, was by no means enthusiastically favourable to the plan of a simultaneous offensive, which entailed diverting large bodies of troops to Salonica, unless the combination included a combined attack by the Russians. A "simultaneous offensive" upon a limited scale, such as that proposed, appeared to him to possess no military advantage. If it included an attack over the whole of the Eastern Front, that was a totally different matter.† But of this there was at the moment no question. Unfortunately General Galliéni's illness had taken a dangerous turn. A second surgical operation had become necessary. He was living in a private hospital at Versailles, and although unable to receive many visitors, he had been kept in close touch with political and military events by his son-in-law, Commandant Grüz, an officer of capacity and remarkable gifts. A fine linguist, but not

* Journals. † *Ibid.*

a soldier by profession, his intellectual qualities forced their way into the counsels of the British and later of the Italian armies. Galliéni's military judgment was uninfluenced by political considerations, but he was far too able a man to ignore the power of military interference which the French Constitution has vested in the Chamber and the Senate. He knew well that Sarrail, a menacing figure, might be weakened by failure, and that the curious unanimity in favour of the Salonica project which prevailed among the different groups of French politicians could be traced to the desire of General Sarrail's friends to provide him with an opportunity of victory, and to the wish of his enemies to offer him chances of defeat.

During his last illness Galliéni's mind had been running upon the precedent of the Revolution; and he formulated a scheme, dictated to his Staff Officers, as the plan took shape in his mind, of a War Council under M. Briand, much on the lines of the Committee of Public Safety, and not differing much from the form of government evolved later in England under Mr. Lloyd George.

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On the 25th of May, 1916, Lord Kitchener

wrote one of the last letters written throughout in his own hand. The views he expressed were in near accord with those of Galliéni : " It is a sad fact that in a Democracy 'eyewash' appears a necessary adjunct to success. The carrying on of a serious war is rendered difficult by this. I am not very happy about the state of affairs in France. Verdun is draining the reserves, and I am rather doubtful if we get all the truth of what is going on. At the same time politicians want an offensive from Salonica, which will mean more men from France. X* seems to think of an offensive there that will not require reinforcements to supply losses. I cannot imagine what he means : no such offensive can be designed or carried out ; and if the offensive is once launched, you must see it through or be prepared for defeat in that theatre."†

On the day following, the 26th of May, Galliéni died suddenly at Versailles. To the French he stood for those military virtues which his own countrymen attributed to Lord Roberts : a soldier and a patriot, of pure and disinterested character. He was the first great

* An eminent French Commander.

† Correspondence.

Frenchman whose greatness dated back before August, 1914, to pass away during the War. It was resolved that he should be buried with pomp and circumstance, and every mark of honour and respect. On the 1st of June, through vast crowds, Galliéni was borne from the Invalides, where he had lain in the Chapel, hung with flags captured by the victorious French armies under Napoleon a century before, to the Hôtel de Ville, where before his bier endless masses of French troops passed and saluted their old chief. Lord Kitchener had telegraphed asking me, who had known Galliéni so well, to represent him at the ceremonial. Sir Douglas Haig had sent his Military Secretary on a similar errand. Immediately after the French Ministers there passed these British representatives of the armies to which Galliéni looked for final victory. A salute which he would have valued more than any homage paid to him personally was fired that same day off Jutland.

One month later, Sir Douglas Haig's guns began that battle on the Somme, which, taken together with what Jellicoe had achieved off Jutland, settled the inevitable issue of the War.

2

"Broyé dans cet atelier inconnu où travaille le hasard."

Nothing was known by his friends in France of Lord Kitchener's intended journey to Russia; and, although some persons believed the secret had been betrayed, it was remarkably well kept from Army Head-Quarters and from British officials in Paris. During the last week of Lord Kitchener's life several messages were received from him through Fitzgerald by those with whom he was accustomed to correspond in France. He expressed cordial agreement with a statement of Sir Maurice Hankey's which he had seen, that, if only it had been possible to stay at the Dardanelles instead of Salonica, the Turks would have been "finished off" during the summer. He had received a letter from the young French officer who had been attached to him for purposes of liaison, and who was dangerously ill, and his message ran, "Give Doumayrou all my amitiés." He commented upon a letter which had been sent to him describing Sir Douglas Haig's organization at Montreuil, adding, "What a comfort

it is to have Haig in command." He was "to be attacked in the House of Commons on Wednesday, but he did not think it would amount to much;" and, when the projected attack was converted into a semi-official interview with members of the House, and after Lord Kitchener had read a memorandum expounding the main points of War Office administration, his forecast was justified, and he and his hearers parted on friendly terms. One who was present,* writing on the morning of the 6th of June, said that the "séance went off really well," and that this opinion was gathered from many, and some unfriendly, sources; that Lord K. had answered questions with great good temper; and that the reception given to him had been excellent both before and after the meeting. The writer, a faithful and devoted friend of Lord Kitchener, continued: "I saw them off on Sunday afternoon for Thurso by special train; they are to call on Jellicoe, and probably put out to sea last night in the *Hampshire*. O'Beirne 'mislaid' his servant, who had in charge all the F.O. cyphers and papers. K., after saying good-bye, looked at the clock, and saying very gently, 'I don't

* Sir Herbert Creedy, K.C.B.

think we need wait any more,' stepped into the train.''

At 1 o'clock on the 6th of June, within an hour, perhaps, of the despatch of this letter, two invited guests were awaiting M. Briand in the private suite of rooms on the first-floor of the Quai d'Orsay. They had been admiring the beautiful *trianon* furniture which had belonged to Marie Antoinette, and marvelling at the wheels of Fate which had turned over these gems by Reissener and Caffiéri from the Austrian Queen to the peasant-bred genius who at the moment was controlling the destinies and activities of France. A few minutes later M. Briand came into the room with a telegram in his hand. He was profoundly moved, and for the next hour he spoke of nothing but the achievements and personality of that Lord Kitchener to whom France owed so great a debt, which her people had repaid with their confidence, but which some of her rulers had not always remembered.

When M. Briand parted from his two guests, one of them, a Frenchman of great influence and experience, said : " Kitchener's was a fine death, and is good for England and France. Never will England lay down her arms till his

death is avenged. He had seen his best days and his work was finished; it is better so."*

A few days later Lord Jellicoe's Report was received, and the details of the loss of the *Hampshire* were known. When Lord Kitchener arrived at Thurso about 11 a.m. on the 5th of June, he crossed in H.M.S. *Oak*, and lunched with the Commander-in-Chief on the *Iron Duke*. At 4 o'clock he left the flagship for the *Hampshire*, and at 5 she proceeded on her way by the route Lord Jellicoe had ordered, westward of the Pentland Firth and close to the western coast of the Orkneys. Lord Jellicoe chose this route because a heavy north-easter was blowing, and the western route gave promise of shelter and a better opportunity for destroyers to screen the *Hampshire* from submarine attack. The route selected was in constant use by mercantile vessels for a very considerable time after the minefield west of the Pentland Firth had been laid by the enemy, and Lord Jellicoe considered it perfectly safe. Two destroyers accompanied the *Hampshire* until they were detached at about 7 p.m. by the Captain of the *Hampshire* owing to the heavy sea. Shortly after 8 p.m.

* Journals.

the Commander of the Western Patrol at Stromness reported by telephone that a cruiser was in difficulties.

Every available vessel was ordered by the Admiral commanding the Orkney and Shetlands to proceed to the scene, and all motor vehicles were ordered to work along the coast. The wind had shifted to the north-north-west and a very heavy sea was running.

From the time of the explosion, so the few survivors reported, about ten minutes elapsed before the *Hampshire* sank.

Lord Kitchener was seen in the gunroom flat, after the explosion, with a naval officer who gave orders to make way for the Field-Marshal, but he was not observed again, although another survivor said that he saw four military officers in khaki and one man in plain clothes on the quarter-deck after the explosion.

When Lord Jellicoe's message was sent off a strong patrol of destroyers and other vessels were at work examining the wreckage; and search-parties on shore were keeping constant watch.

The sea had been far too heavy to enable sweeping operations to be carried out, so that it was impossible to be sure of the cause of the

disaster. Lord Jellicoe, however, was of opinion that the heavy seas made a successful submarine attack almost prohibitive, and was forced to the conclusion that the *Hampshire* struck either a moored mine, or a mine which had drifted from the minefield westward of the Orkneys.*

It has never been suggested by any competent authority that an error of judgment was made in the selection of the route by which the ill-fated *Hampshire* proceeded, or that anything was done or left undone which could have averted her loss.

The idea that the *Hampshire* was destroyed by submarine attack or by a mine specially laid for the purpose has been finally rejected. That Lord Kitchener met his death at the hands of the enemy never has been and never can be disputed; but it was the good-fortune of the Germans rather than their skill which relieved them from the weight of his determined enmity, and which deprived England of her foremost champion.

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Although this book is called "The Tragedy

* Lord Jellicoe's telegram.

of Lord Kitchener," its title is not meant to recall the sinking of a great warship in the stormy seas of the Orkneys, but rather to emphasize that hour when in mid-career, or what appeared to his countrymen a mid-career of fame, he himself became suddenly aware that the golden bowl was broken.

Throughout his wide and stirring life in the East, Lord Kitchener had commanded success easily; honours had been showered upon him and unstinted praise. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly, in 1914, he found himself confronted with difficulties from which his whole career had been free. The rush which had sprung up miraculously in the sands of the desert could not grow on the London clay without mire, and he began to see that in this new and treacherous soil, to which his feet were unaccustomed, they were likely to stick. To the poet's vision the tragedy of Hamlet lay in the hero's consciousness of his own irresolution, and not in the holocaust of death amid which the play ends. Lord Kitchener's tragedy was not dissimilar, inasmuch as he realized that the qualities of mind and character which had served him well through life were under these entirely new conditions out of place.

If this book fulfils its purpose, which is to throw certain sidelights on the bearing of a great Englishman during the first eighteen months of a war when England was hard pressed, a reader should have gathered that no short formula can be used to describe Lord Kitchener.

Rhodes was called by Lord Rosebery a practical idealist, and the phrase fitted him well; but no two words can give a true idea of Lord Kitchener—not because his mind and character were complex, but because of their contradictions. Great man he was, but not cast in the greatest mould. He was not, like Napoleon or Cromwell or William of Orange, always true to type, as the greatest men of action almost invariably are.

Reckoned to be firm and resolute and strong, he was certainly at times all three, but he was also during the last years of his life often malleable and irresolute. Silent, reserved, and secretive, he was certainly at times all three, but he could also be garrulous and self-revealing. Of his religion, if he had one, nothing was known, although his biographer, who was his friend, has claimed for him a place on the side of the angels; but others, who knew him well,

have said that his innermost thoughts were as free as Huxley's.

It was certainly difficult in the ordinary business of those fateful months to get Lord Kitchener to give unqualified assent to any proposition the truth of which was not so clear and distinct that it could not be doubted. In that respect he triumphantly passed the Cartesian test. Lord Cromer once said of him that, while incapable of great initiative, he was an incomparable agent. Like many uncultured men, he was apt to take himself as the measure of the world, so that his task, when he attempted to disentangle the opinion of a colleague from his character, was complicated by his own furtive mind. By the light of his inexperience he was far too apt to judge the motives and opinions of a colleague like Mr. Balfour, who for his part, with wide knowledge of men and affairs, made no pretence of being able to understand Lord Kitchener.

He was a man who rarely made declaration of affection, but he valued friendship; and a soft look, quite unmistakable, came over his face when General Birdwood was mentioned. He spoke with reverential gentleness of Hatfield House and its inmates. If the common

habit of his mind was one of coldness, there were moments when he was far from indifferent to the affections of others. His biographer seems to be unaware of, or unwilling to disclose, any deep attachment to a woman. This reticence leaves incomplete the story of his life or betrays a flaw in his nature. He may have been stoically content with the limits of the companionships he formed, for there is certainly no trace of sentiment or emotion in the three volumes in which his life has been described.

Persistently he cared for *things—objets*, as the French call them—and this form of self-indulgence is perhaps rarely combined with a love for human beings. He loved Broome, which was the work of his hands, and worked Fitzgerald as hard among the rose-trees there as among his letters at York House. Once he said : " Tell your French friends not to give me the Legion of Honour, which I am told they intend to do ; but persuade them to send me two pieces of Gobelins tapestry out of the Garde Meuble." He cared nothing for decorations except in so far as they would adorn Broome. On another occasion he told a friend who had offered him some books for the Broome library,

whose empty shelves yawned at him as a stimulus for acquisition: "Give me old bindings; the books don't matter."

And yet it is doubtful whether he had ever thought of living at Broome, so loud in his blood was the call of the East.

That Lord Kitchener was a rare type is certainly true; that his was an abiding influence cannot be urged; nor did he ever pretend, like Gordon, to inspire large and true ideas. But the impress of his character upon myriads of human beings of diverse races, in the lands where his life-work was mainly done, was deeply felt.

* * * * *

There are moments in K.'s life which I like to remember; his gentleness at Khartoum when he stood on the spot where Gordon fell; his growling admission to a friend* who like him had cried when the Mutiny veterans marched past at Lord Curzon's Durbar; the tone of his voice when he spoke of "Birdie"; the joy of battle in his eyes as described by one who saw him in the front trenches at Anzac;† and finally my own memory of him as I saw him at Calais, when I had driven through a wild storm from

* Lord Durham. † Lord Horne.

Hazebrouck—great gusts of wind sweeping over the gloomy town—where he was meeting, in one of the last full discussions, the political leaders of the Western Powers.

A few yards away, lashed to the pier, was the destroyer which was to take him home. When towards evening his tall cloaked figure appeared, he stood like Saul, "from his head and shoulders and upwards, higher than any of the people."

A few moments later he had moved away and was lost in the mist and spray of the angry sea.

"And even then he turned; and more and more
The moony vapour rolling round the King,
Who seemed the phantom of a Giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
And grayer, till himself became a mist,
. . . moving ghostlike to his doom."

TENNYSON.

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